

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1970.—VOL. LXXXVI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 2, 1901.

[PRICE ONE PENCE.]



"SUNBEAM!" HE SAID, WITH A HALF CRY, "YOU HERE?"

LADY SUNBEAM.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"SHE IS NOT THE WIFE FOR YOU."

She was called "Sunbeam," "Sunshine," "Kitten," "Mayflower," "Fairy," "Sprite"—anything but her own name, which was simply May.

She was one of those creatures who are always called by any amount of pet names—the first that came handy; and the one that stuck to her most persistently was Sunbeam.

She was a veritable sunbeam. She seemed born only to bring sunshine and brightness into everyone's life, to dance and sing, and light up the corners—one of those vivid, happy temperaments that revel in the mere fact of being alive, to whom a beautiful form or colour—

flower, a leaf—gives a sort of intense joy just because they are lovely. Her eye roamed from one thing to another, resting on what was beautiful, shunning what was ugly.

And she herself was most beautiful—the most perfect little form. She was not tall. She was slender and graceful as a kitten, with delicately made hands and feet, with skin-tints that were like porcelain, with great brown eyes that sparkled and flashed; looked arch and wistful, now and then, and had an odd, luminous look in them too, notwithstanding that they were so brilliant, and a head "sunning over with curls."

That was May Charteris, before whom and whose charms Sir Wilford Errol went down like a nine-pin. He surrendered at discretion.

There never was a doubt about it from the beginning, and the beginning was not far from the end. And Sir Wilford was a very great catch, for he was very handsome—everyone liked him for the winning charm and sympathy of his nature.

And he was very rich, for though of hereditary lands he had not a great deal, and derived but a small portion of his income therefrom, an uncle, by marriage, who had accumulated a large fortune in successful speculations, had bequeathed the whole of this to his favourite nephew.

So when Wilford asked to be allowed to transfer Sunbeam from her father's heart into his own, Mr. Charteris made no objection, if Sunbeam approved of the transfer.

And Sunbeam did approve. No one but Wilford could make out that she had it in her nature to give a very devoted or profound love, but he swore she had depths in her that other folks did not see, and that she loved him not only for his handsome person and his position, and his wealth, but for himself.

"She isn't the wife for you, Wilford," said his sister Isabel, dogmatically. Isabel was fond of laying down the law, and disliked the idea of giving way in her brother's house to this little fly-away Hop-o'-my-Thumb, who cared only for beautiful dresses and sparkling jewels.

"She's as vain as a peacock. Do you know what she said to me one day, quite frankly and without a blush? 'I like to look at my reflection; it is so lovely—I do like lovely forms.' I stared, and she couldn't think what she had said, or pretended not to; then she laughed as, I suppose, it dawned on her, and said, skipping away. 'Oh, Wilford would understand.' Non-sense!"

"Wilford does understand, my dear girl," returned that young man, with a lazy smile. "The child isn't vain. It's just the love of beauty! It's impersonal, don't you see?"

"I confess I don't. I fail to understand such subtle distinctions!" said Miss Errol. "Well, I warn you, Wilford. When too late you'll find her utterly wanting—shallow, vain, frivolous! Why, all her life she's been looked on as a child who could do nothing but dance through life. Everyone has waited on her, she must do nothing—everything disagreeable must be kept from her. She's just like a Dresden china ornament!"

"All right. Have you done, sister mine?" said that good-tempered Wilford.

"No; I haven't. She's frightfully extravagant—doesn't know anything about house-keeping, or the ordering of a big establishment—"

"Oh, that's all right, Bells," interrupted Wilford laughing. "My Sunbeam won't want to interfere with you. Of course you'll stay on with us, and take all that off her shoulders till you marry!"

"Well, of course, if you wish it," said Isabel; "but there's another thing, Wilford—there's Hal—"

"What about Hal?" said Wilford, lazily.

"Well, people will say you married a child for your young brother to flirt with," said Isabel, but she grew pale at the way Wilford flashed out—

"Isabel, be careful what you say," he said, with more anger than he had ever shown his sister. "Hal will be her brother. He is wild and unstable enough, but he is an Errol. Flirting is out of the question between brother and sister."

"Oh, not serious, of course," said Isabel, subdued; "but May is so headless. Well, I didn't mean anything," Wilford, as Wilford looked blacker at that; "but I tell you Sunbeam has no heart, and it grieves me to the soul to see you infatuated with a silly little creature like that, who hasn't a serious or intellectual thought in her head."

"A terrible indictment! My poor little Sunbeam," said Wilford, smiling now. He was very easy going, and his flush of anger soon died away. "You can do all the intellectuality of the house, and leave the spooning to Sunbeam and me."

"She won't care about that after the honeymoon," said Isabel, bluntly, "unless it means jewels and dresses."

"Ah, there we differ, my child," returned her brother, calmly. "If Sunbeam is a trifle vain, all girls are. I wouldn't like to see a pretty girl who wasn't a little vain. And, sister mine," said Wilford, rising and passing, half bantering but very affectionately, the neat head of his sister, "there are other kinds of vanity than that of a lovely person, aren't there?"

At which Isabel coloured and looked rigid, for she was known to have a not inconsiderable opinion of her powers of management and general capacity for ordering other folks' affairs.

She had held the management of her brother's house since she was a girl of eighteen—no older than May Charteris—and she was now twenty-four, and there was a large establishment and much society seen in that house. So perhaps Hal had something to be vain of. Still, she did not like to be reminded of it.

But as Wilford left her, and she had no answer ready if he hadn't, the subject perforce dropped.

All this occurred at Charteris Lodge, where Wilford and Isabel were staying, when the former fell before Sunbeam's unconscious powers.

"Come here, Sunbeam," said Wilford, a day or two afterwards, "I want to talk to you seriously."

Sunbeam, sitting about the rose-garden, sprang like a deer up the terrace steps, and was caught in his arms. She stretched up on tiptoe to put up her lips to his, like a veritable child. The top of her sunny head came up to his chin.

"Come into the garden, May—or Maud," said Wilford, smiling into the witching eyes, simply because you could not choose but smile at anything so lovely and winsome, "I want to have a serious talk with Sunbeam."

She made a noise.

"Serious! Oh, no, Wilford! I couldn't listen; I hate serious talk!" said she, making a little *pas* with her foot as she stood within his arm, and rippling over with laughter. "I like to look at your face, Wilford," putting up one hand to pass it down the outline of his straight features. "You're like a statue, you know!"

He took and kissed the little hand.

"What nonsense you talk, humming-bird!" said he, half laughing, wholly admiring the pretty attitude of her head—on one side, with a critical look in her face. "You must try and be serious, dearest."

"Oh, dear!" with a sigh, and upward look from the little lady. "Well, I suppose, Wilford, if I don't try you'll pick me up and put me in your pocket!"

"I think I shall, fairy! So you had better come quietly."

She looked at him a second, as if some rather serious thoughts had come into her head; then laughed, and pulling herself away, sprang on before him, down the steps, through the rose-garden to the lovely glades of parkland beyond.

"I shall call you Will-o'-the-Wisp among your other names," said Wilford, whose long strides soon caught her up. "Come and sit here on this bank, sweetheart, and listen to me!"

He seated himself, and imprisoned Sunbeam in his arms, where she rested in tolerable quietness, twisting herself round to look up into his face.

"Because I must," said she. "Wilford, when we are married I shall do nothing but stare at you. Oh! I can't help it!" cried the girl, and threw herself across his breast in an ecstasy. "I love beauty, and colour, and light, and all that is lovely on the face of the earth. I love myself—because I am beautiful, and Isabel was shocked; but you understand, Wilford!"

"My own child! Yes; but, dearest—"

"Ah! now don't tell me that beauty fades, and we get ugly and old," said Sunbeam quickly. "You'll never, never be ugly, Wilford."

"Would you have loved me if I had been?"

Wilford asked, half wistfully.

"You wouldn't have loved me, sir, if I had been 'ugly,'" laughed the girl, with a change of manner so rapid as to be almost startling. Could she really be serious for a minute together?

"Now, what is it you're going to talk about, Sir Wisdom? I'm your prisoner, so I'll try and listen with the meekness becoming the future Lady Errol."

CHAPTER II.

HER USE IN THE WORLD.

"WELL then, sweetheart," said Sir Wilford, putting back the sunny curls from the girl's forehead; "it is just about our marriage and subsequent *ménage* that I want your attention. You know my sister Isabel and my young brother Halbert have always lived with me. My home has been theirs, and there has been, in fact, no suitable home for Isabel but mine; and Halbert—well, dearest, he is not so very steady, so I thought it best for him not to live in chambers

"Not steady!" interrupted Sunbeam, with open eyes. "Why, I thought he was a banker, or something horrid! Oh, Wilford, how proud you are!" cried the sprite, laughing. "You coloured at that—don't deny it!"

"I detest that banking affair altogether, Sunbeam," returned her lover as he smiled at her; "but Halbert is only junior partner in the house, and does very little at that either. It was a clause in my uncle's will that Hal was to go

into the bank, so it had to be, else he would forfeit his share. He doesn't mind much," said Wilford, with a touch of bitterness; "but never mind that now, Sunbeam. What I want to ask you is this: Should you have any objection to Isabel and Hal being with us? It's not an arrangement one would choose; and if you have the slightest idea you won't like it, darling—"

"Oh, but why should I? It will be jolly," said Sunbeam. "If you like it, of course I shouldn't mind. Isabel is huge fun!"

"Sunbeam! Sunbeam! you look on everything as fun," said Wilford, ever so little regretfully.

"Well, Sir Wisdom, how else shall I look on them!" said Miss Mischief. "You're the greatest fun of all; trying to lecture me and—and caring for your little Sunbeam all the time so much that you can't. See, you are laughing now! Will Isabel keep house, order and say what you're to have for dinner and all that?"

"I thought you wouldn't care for that sort of thing, Sunbeam," said Wilford, "and Isabel likes it."

"It will be nice," said *insouciant* Sunbeam. "I know nothing about housekeeping, and I hate being domestic; and I like going about and dancing; and you'll take me about, won't you, Wilford?"

"Naturally, sweetheart."

"How nice we shall look together," said Sunbeam, reflectively. "I sometimes wish I could be someone else for a little time just to see how we should look."

"What a queer little soul you are," said Wilford, with a laugh. "You can see that in a mirror."

"Oh, but to see with other eyes! That's what I mean," said Sunbeam. "How funny to see oneself coming up a room! Oh! please, am I to be serious any more?"

"I can't find out that you've ever begun, you sprite," said Wilford, smiling. "You didn't listen to me two minutes before you interrupted, and then you say 'it's fun' to have Isabel in the house. My own child," Wilford said, with real gravity and earnestness now, "I am not in the least sure you know what you are giving your consent to."

"What about Isabel? Why, Wilford, do you think I would drive your sister out?" said Sunbeam.

She didn't speak gravely or look grave, or anything serious at all, but Wilford caught her to his breast nevertheless, and covered the lovely face with kisses.

"My Sunbeam!" he said passionately, "will you ever know how much I love you?"

And a strange thrill went through Sunbeam, and she looked up straight into his eyes with scarcely a flush on her cheek, and then for some unknown reason hid her face against him, just for a few seconds, then lifted it and began to laugh.

"How can you care for such a silly little thing as I?" said she, merrily. "What puzzles men are! You ought to fall in love with someone older and much more intellectual than I am, and you must go and—love me! I shall be no use to you—none at all!"

"Only be my Sunbeam," said Wilford softly. She lay quiet for perhaps a moment.

"Only your Sunbeam!" she said then, with a curious intonation that bewildered him. Then she drew herself from him and got up and walked away, and stood by a big rose-bush, with her back turned to him.

Wilford paused a moment, then sprang up and came to her side.

"My darling," he said, tenderly, "what is it I have said—what—"

But Sunbeam suddenly burst into a passion of tears, and threw herself on his breast and, startled as he was by this strange, new mood, Wilford only strove to soothe her, and in a very few minutes the sun shone out again, and the rain had ceased.

"Why did you cry so, my heart?" whispered Wilford, softly.

"I don't know—and indeed she did not. I told you I was a silly little thing; but," she

said, with a strange wistfulness, and her brown eyes got that luminous look, "if I cry, Wilford, I shall lose the only use I have in the world."

"What is that, darling?"

"Why, just to be your Sunbeam," said the girl, and suddenly sprang away through the garden.

CHAPTER III.

"YOUR WIFE—YOUR SUNBEAM."

WHEN Sir Wilford asked Sunbeam when the marriage was to take place she only laughed and said "when he liked."

"It's great fun getting married, isn't it?" she said, gaily.

"I can't speak from experience, hummingbird," returned he, gravely. "I expect you'll get fun out of it—out of this, too."

He put a golden casket into her hands.

"Jewels!" she said, in a breathless way, and sprang to him, and kissed him in her fervent, childlike way. "Oh, Wilford!"

She took the jewels out—a superb necklace of three rows of diamonds. He watched her with a curious eagerness, questioning wistfulness, watched her rapture. She held them up to the light, stood speechless, as they sparkled and scintillated, and gave back rainbow rays.

"Oh, how lovely!" she said. "Clasp them on me—you, Wilford—not I," and drew him to look in the mirror at her reflection. "Isn't it lovely!" she said, quite softly, but with sparkling eyes. "Wilford, are these to wear on the wedding-day?"

"Will you, sweetheart?"

"And no other jewels, Wilford—only this that you gave me!" said Sunbeam, smiling. "Now you may take them off—no, let me put them in the casket. I love to see them undulate like that. So now they'll stop there till I wear them—then—"

So this Sunbeam danced through all the wedding preparations, finding an intense joy in all the lovely things prepared for her, and driving Isabel out of her wits with perplexity at her singular "vanity" she must call it.

"I can't make you out, child," she said, once. The wedding-gown lay on a sofa, its soft, shining folds hanging in exquisite drapery, and Sunbeam had taken up the train and was stroking the smooth surface with a sort of fondness, watching the light on it as she held it in different positions.

"Are you really admiring that in an abstract way?"

Sunbeam smiled.

"This!" she said. "Oh, no, not quite; it's a wedding-gown!"

"Well, what difference does that make? When you were petting that lace the other day, you said it didn't matter who wore it, it would give you pleasure all the same."

"Yes; but then it wasn't this," was all Sunbeam could answer.

"Then it is vanity, May!"

At which Sunbeam had sprung at her sister-in-law, overwhelmed her with an embrace, and said she was terribly vain, silly, fly-away. Wilford would have enough of her. All of which rather matter-of-fact Isabel took *au sérieux* and sighed for her brother's future.

Hal was simply enchanted with his new sister's beauty, but to Isabel, whose special pet he was, said, rather contemptuously, —

"She's a perfect little fool, and Wilford's just infatuated. It does seem hard to lose one's chance for a frivolous little maiden like that!"

"But, dear, Wilford would have married any how some time."

"I'm not so sure. He likes such a porcelain doll as that. She's awfully lovely, of course; but I fancied Will might want a little more brain than that feather-headed child."

"How are things going with you, Hal?" asked his sister, and Hal looked gloomy.

"Oh, decidedly!" said he. "Will keeps one so

infinitely short. Perhaps he'll be in a good

humour now, and give me a cheque. All those

jewels he's given Sunbeam! Bless my soul! they'd sell for thousands."

"She'd never give them up if her husband was starving," said Isabel, bitterly. "It's sickening to see her insatiable vanity, and then Wilford says, indulgently, 'Oh, she's only a child, and it's beautiful things she loves! If she is a little extravagant, and a trifle foolish in her way of expressing her joy, it is very pretty folly, and will pass."

"Just like Will," said his brother, with a laugh. "Tender-hearted chap he is. Wouldn't have borne with me so long if he hadn't been," said Hal, who thought it a dispensation of Providence this tender heart of his brother's, and therefore he need not be grateful for it.

No one could make out that Sunbeam was serious, even on her wedding-day. She was bright and flushed, and sparkled like her diamonds, which the foolish little thing kissed before she put on. Whether she had the least idea of the responsibility she was undertaking was a mystery—probably not. She wasn't nervous; she didn't cry nor look pale, but radiant; and as she approached the bridegroom, as he stood awaiting her at the chancel steps, she actually looked up into his eyes and smiled. But he knew that her hand did tremble a little as he held it, but clasped his so clinging, nevertheless, and he saw what no one else did when she said, "I will," that her eyes got that luminous look, which he understood if no one else did, he thought.

Did she feel the parting from her father—her friends? Would she cry when her father held her to him and kissed her so tenderly, his motherless child, who had been his Sunbeam too, and whom he was sending now away to shine in someone else's home? She was quite still in his arms, and was a little pale, when Wilford quietly called her, and said they would be late for their train.

But the next minute she was smiling at the showers of rice and the farewell slippers, and said, roguishly, to her husband,—

"I said it was great fun being married, didn't I?"

But she was a bewildering little thing after all; for in the train, when Wilford drew her to him and called her softly "his darling wife," all of a sudden, as she had done in the rose garden, she pulled herself away and walked right to the far window of the saloon, with her face turned from him.

"Your wife, Wilford, I am your wife," he heard her say, as he approached her, in a half whisper, and she had a strange look—not fear, but awe—on her young face. And when he took her in his arms, she stood quite silent, with her head on his breast, her face hidden. When he whispered something, wondering what was passing in his mind, she only said, in a choked way, "Don't speak to me, just hold me—so."

So for more than ten minutes he held her to him, stroking her sunny curls; then at last she whispered, "Your wife—your Sunbeam."

Perhaps all that time she had been adjusting her place in the economy of nature, and had come to the conclusion that that was to be her use in the world—a dancing, brilliant Sunbeam, to deal out brightness with lavish hand and shine—just because a Sunbeam can't help shining!

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE HONEYMOON.

"It looks very pretty, but surely Wilford must tire of that sort of thing."

That was what Isabel was thinking as she sat at the library fire, with a book on her knee, but her eyes were lifted with a sort of fascination to watch the two at the table.

Wilford was writing, or was supposed to be writing, but the process can hardly be continuous with a fairy perched on the arm of your chair, laughing and chattering, and disturbing you every minute.

He didn't seem to mind much. They were not long returned from the honeymoon, which, by the way, had extended over the winter months,

abroad, and they found themselves in town in April for the season, fairly established in Upper Brooke-street, where, as heretofore, Isabel was the reigning genius of the household department.

"I leave the ornamental part to you," said she, to her sister-in-law, and Sunbeam seemed quite content.

"I'm thankful Wilford will get some dinners," said she; "not that he cares much, only I suppose he wants things to go somehow."

"They'd go 'somehow' with a vengeance with you at the helm," thought Isabel.

She did not love her little sister, had always a latent jealousy of her, and had not yet found out any of those hidden powers which Wilford declared to lie under the sunny curls of his "Sunbeam."

He, like all the rest of the world, could not but treat her as a precious treasure indeed, but a darling plaything, something to be sheltered from all worry, from the very "breath of heaven," if it visited her cheek too roughly.

Thus, she knew nothing of any sort of trouble with regard to Hal. She had no idea that Hal was wild, extravagant, ran through money like water, was always "sponging" on his brother, who, for the sake of the mother he had idolised, for the sake of Isabel, who was wrapped up in Hal, and for the sake of the old name of Erol, bore with him and strove to keep him within bounds.

He always smoothed away grave lines when Sunbeam came near, always was soft and indulgent to her, even when she was thoughtless and extravagant, as the little Lady Sunbeam was.

To-day she had perched herself on Wilford's arm-chair, and put her winsome face against his, with her arch smile and perfect confidence that she was never in the way.

She looked more perfectly lovely now than ever she had before; that was all the change in her, except that she wore a long tea-gown of cream silk and pale pink plush, with a stand-up ruff, and her curls stanning over her head in the old way.

"My Sunbeam!" Wilford said, fondly, and put an arm about her; "what does this coxcomb want?"

"Oh! only to tease you a little," returned Sunbeam, audaciously. "I've been doing all the flowers, and putting a lot of my things, presents, in brackets, and—and now I've nothing to do."

"So you must come and tease me, sweetheart! But I am writing."

"What are you writing?" said Sunbeam, peeping over. "Something for that tiresome old Review! Let me see! Take away your hand, Will. If we inquire a little further into the effect of— You can't get any further, Sir Wisdom, you see. You want me to help you."

"You, Sunbeam! Why, I can't write with you at my right hand like a sprite."

"Don't be so childish, Sunbeam," said Isabel suddenly, from the fireside. "How can Wilford write like that?"

Wilford looked up with a flash.

"Let the child be," he said, but more quietly than his eyes gave promise of.

Sunbeam's eyes danced with mischief.

"Poor old Is!" said she. "She thinks me an awful plague; but I don't plague you, Wilford, do I?"

"No, my pet, never," said Wilford, tenderly.

"I like to have you plaguing anyhow."

"How you spoil that child, Wilford," said Isabel. "It's quite ridiculous."

"Sunbeam can't be spoilt except by quenching their light, sister mine," remarked Wilford, and Sunbeam put in, laughing.

"I'm not a child, I'm a matron, Isabel," at which assertion Wilford burst out laughing too, and Isabel held her peace, and Sunbeam was allowed to tease to her heart's content.

Wilford tried to write, but Sunbeam now read over, now suggested a word when he paused, now put her little soft hand on his, and, with any number of such tricks, took her right to plague.

"But, sweetheart!" remonstrated the victim, half laughing, just a little vexed, at which Sun-

beam clapped her hands and laughed like a glee-
ful child.

"I have made you cross at last! Isabel! what fun! Wilford is vexed. And you said I never plagued you!" cried she, springing off her perch, and kneeling instead at her husband's feet. "Do penance, sir, for that—cray, and you shall kiss me as—penance."

"That is no penance, Sunbeam," said Wilford, smilng down into the lovely face lifted to his, and to which he gave not one but many kisses. "Now are you going to be a good child, and let me get on with this article?"

"Do you really want to, Wil?"

"Honour bright, sweetheart. I promised it to-morrow, and you want to go to the opera to-night, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I'm going to look lovely to-night, Wilford! Do come and see my gown; the colour is too lovely. Do come!"

An impudent move from Isabel.

Wilford smiled indulgently, and laid down his pen and rose.

"Come, then, sweetheart, and show me your wonderful toilette," he said, and Sunbeam danced off before him.

And Isabel covered her face, with angry tears in her eyes.

"Oh! how can men be such fools!" she said, through her teeth. "Little vain bundle of frivolity dragging a man of thirty off to see a gown! Bah! Wilford has gone mad, I think, over her lovely face."

"Hello! Isabel," said Hal's voice at the door, and he lounged that young man, and threw himself in a chair; "what's up? my lady been reactive?"

"Oh, Hal! It's you—I am glad!" Isabel said, and she dropped her hands with a glad light in her eyes. "No; to do her justice, May never asserts herself in my department. But—oh, Hal! Wilford has made a mistake, I'm afraid!"

"Well, if he don't see it that's his look-out. I'm not so sure of it, though. Anyway, why do you bother your head about it? That's your concern."

"It worries me, I can't help it," said Isabel. "She's been in here playing childish tricks all the afternoon, just like a child of ten. Then he must see some gowns. Such nonsense!"

"Tisn't the gown he goes for, my dear—it's the dear little girl who wears it! Why don't you try and teach her the way she should go—teach her how to order things, and that!"

Isabel flashed and answered:

"It would be more trouble than enough! She did try to take up a few things by way of a new fad, but I soon drilled that out of her. Fancy that child in the housekeeper's room!"

"I think she's fond of Wilford," remarked Hal, by way of saying something for poor Sunbeam.

"Do you think so? I don't. He's a new toy," said Isabel, with curling lip. "He indulges her, and gives her everything under the sun she wants. She declared she married him because they were both so handsome, and her style contrasted so splendidly with his, that abroad every one used to stare at the tall, statuque husband and the lovely porcelain-tinted wife, 'just up to his chin.' All such rubbish she talks!"

"She was poking fun, Isa; you are so matter-of-fact," said Hal, with a brother's frankness. "I've an idea she's fond of him in her way, anyhow. I want to see Wilford, by the way."

"He's taking her to the opera to-night."

"Oh, it'll do when he comes in. I want to talk to him," said Hal, gloomily, and beginning to walk up and down. "I'm dounced hard up."

"Oh, Hal! why don't you try and keep within bounds," said his sister, disturbed.

"Women don't understand anything about a fellow's expenses," returned Hal, half impatiently. "I lost a pot of money on those confounded races last week. Everything went wrong. I must settle up, and I haven't money to do it, that's a fact."

"Oh, Hal!"

"I made sure Devilhoof would win," said Hal.

"But you always make sure that your horses are going to win," remonstrated Isabel.

"Oh—well—it's all a chance in the racing world," said Hal, with a laugh. "Hush! here comes Wilford."

The two brothers greeted each other, Wilford with a softened eye for the younger.

"Back from the city, old fellow!" said he, and the younger answered—

"Yes, glad enough to get away; but he hadn't been to the city at all."

"What have you done with Sunbeam?" asked Hal, and Wilford laughed and said she was telling them to bring tea into the library—it was so "easy," she said.

"Well, was the dress wonderful?" asked Isabel, with a flavour of sarcasm.

"Oh, yes—worth seeing," rejoined Wilford, gravely, "and my child's pleasure still more worth seeing."

"Over a gown?" said Isabel, with contempt.

"Why shouldn't a girl have pleasure over a gown? It's very innocent!" Wilford said, who generally managed to keep his temper over Isabel's strictures on his young wife. "Sunbeam has an artist's eye for anything lovely, whether it's a gown or a flower—that's all."

Sunbeam smiling in, however, at this moment put a stop to attack and defence, and tea came in with her, and the conversation became general. Sunbeam sitting on a low stool at her husband's feet, with her sunny head on his knee, his hand ever and anon caressing her curly hair.

Even that was an offence to Isabel, who thought it "silly" and "childish."

On Wilford's return from the opera with Sunbeam, and when she was just leaving to go up to bed, Hal stopped Wilford and asked him to give him a quarter of an hour.

"All right, Hal." But Sunbeam, who was very quick, caught the slightest change of countenance with which it was said, and wondered why it was.

Wilford saw her to the door, kissed her softly, and watched the graceful, lithe form up the stairs, then turned, with a half smile and a half sigh, back into the dining-room.

CHAPTER V.

"I AM NO USE."

"WELL, Hal, what is it?" said Sir Wilford, coming over to the mantel-piece. He pretty well know what it was.

"I'm in a dacee of a fix, Wilford, that's the truth," Hal answered. He did not beat about the bush, but went straight to the point; it was no good doing anything else with Wilford.

"Well, what's the hole now?" asked the older brother, quicly. "I think your normal condition, Hal, is being in a fix."

The other laughed. His sins sat lightly on his shoulders, and he had quite got to consider it was Wilford's duty to pick him out of the holes he got into.

"It's those confounded horses," he said—"the races last week. I haven't a cent to pay up my losses with, Wilford."

"You surely knew that before you laid your money on, Hal. You thought you were going to win naturally; but it's the mostest gambling—on the chance. I'm pretty well sick of paying your debts, dear boy," said Wilford, leaning against the mantel-piece, "and that's the truth, if you want it."

Hal stared.

"You may stare your eyes out of your head, my boy," said the other, not at all unkindly; "but it's a fact all the same. You see, you don't pull up as you've promised time and again, and I can't go on for ever shelling out, especially now there's my wife to think of. There were her settlements and future contingencies to provide for, perhaps. You see, Hal, one has to be more careful with new responsibilities."

"You don't mind what you spend on your wife," Hal said, with some bitterness, and Wilford laughed. He was rarely angry with any one over small things, but looked at these in a cynical, philosophising mood.

"Dear boy," he said, "my wife is my wife. My money is my own to spend on her if I like."

—I am bound to keep her for instance. Am I bound to pay not your just debts even, but your wanton extravagances? Have you the right to ask it of me? I'm not a millionaire, you know."

Halbert sat down and leaned his head on his hand. He looked pale and haggard; this new view of the case and Wilford's marriage was a "facer."

"What is the immediate pressure?" Wilford asked after a minute.

"A matter of a thousand," returned the other gloomily.

"What business had you to chance losing so much, Hal? You knew you'd have to come to me?"

"Well, of course," said Hal. I suppose so if I thought at all, but I never reckon to lose—no fellow ever does."

Wilford turned and walked up and down the room a few moments; then pausing by Hal, he laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"If I pay this, Hal, give you this thousand pounds, will you promise me to have done with the turf altogether? Racing is a pastime for rich men, not for moderately off ones; and though I'm rich enough I don't intend to pay for your pastime any more, do you see? I'll settle this once more. After this you've got to understand, my boy, that I do no more for you—absolutely, remember."

Halbert looked up in his brother's face rather curiously the older thought. He wished to Heaven he could get rid of a curious distrust he had of the younger brother. There was always a lack of proper straightforwardness on his part—a sort of constitutional inaccuracy he supposed.

"Well, I'll give it up," Hal said, "if you'll settle this time. I suppose it is different now you're married."

"And you must pull up, Hal, in a general way," said Wilford. "You're twenty-six; it's time a fellow has done with his fling. Sow the last of your wild oats, and sow corn instead. You've money enough, if you weren't so denced extravagant, to marry on, and be comfortable. Well, you'd better turn in, old man, and get to sleep. I'll see you to-morrow," said Wilford, quitting his easy position and stretching himself. "It's past one; I'm going up, so can you."

He turned out the lamps, lighted his brother's candle and gave it him, and the two brothers went up to their room.

It scarcely occurred to Hal to even thank his brother for his generosity. What he thought of was his brother's new crotchet of not being quite so generous as heretofore, all because he had taken unto himself a wife.

That same little wife said to Wilford the next day.—

"Wilford, why did you look different when Hal asked to see you last night?"

"How did I look different, my Sunbeam?" asked Wilford, smiling at her.

"Oh, as if you were vexed. I thought why are you vexed with Hal? Because he is in a bank!" said Sunbeam laughing.

"No, sweetheart, he can't help that, but you mustn't worry this curly head about such things; you mustn't have any worries at all, darling!" said Wilford softly, and Sunbeam nestled to him, but without a laugh or a bright smile or look.

"You all try and keep everything disagreeable from me," she said, with little sigh; "every one did at home. That's what makes me so childlike. Wilford, I wish—" she stopped, and her soft fingers travelled up his watch chain and down again.

"What do you wish, dearest?"

She suddenly threw her head back on his breast.

"I wish," she said, vehemently, "that something might happen, some dreadful calamity, that I might show you how—how I love you, Wilford."

And when she had said it she buried her face against him, quivering. What a strange mixture of passionate feeling and childish superficiality she was! Wilford was startled. A kind of dread shook him.

"My darling!" he said quickly, "don't talk so—don't wish anything like that—what need? Do I not know you love me, dearest?"

"But I do nothing for you, and I am thoughtless, and I love pretty things and Isabel says I am frivolous and I tease you," said the lovely penitent, half in tears, half with laughter. "You pet me, and never mind anything I do or say, and I'm no use."

"My dear child! I love you just as you are," Wilford said tenderly. "Sunbeam, troubles come fast enough, without your wishing for them! Love you as I will, my child, I can't keep the door shut on them always for you."

"Would you tell me, Wilford, if you had any trouble?" said Sunbeam wistfully.

"Why should you be made sad?" Wilford asked. "I could not see this dear face other than bright; you are a sunbeam, sweetheart. That is a good mission in life to have, isn't it?"

"Y—yes," said Sunbeam, soberly. She stood twisting her wedding-ring round and round; then said, with bent head and dropped eyes, "but, Wilford, when we were married I said 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer.' Don't you see, if I am nothing but just a bright little butterfly thing, I can't be a real wife to you!"

Wilford drew her close to him and kissed the soft lips that spoke so wistfully.

"You are only made for sunshine, my heart," he said very tenderly. "If trouble comes, dear, you will be always still my Sunbeam. Then don't trouble this head of yours any more, sweetheart: sing and dance and be happy; that is all you have to think of now."

So they all combined, one out of love, another out of carelessness, another out of jealousy and contempt to put poor little Sunbeam in her place. She concluded with a sigh that must be all she was good for, "to sing, and dance, and be happy."

She was Wilford's darling and delight; his pleasure seemed to be in humouring every whim, in giving her all manner of beautiful things, jewels, and gowns, and flowers, and art works that she loved.

She was always bright and smiling, nothing ever put her out of temper, and Isabel's quiet hectoring never seemed to worry her. No one could guess the amount of heroism hidden under that bright sunny head of the young wife who began dimly to see that she wasn't head of her own house, and that Wilford seemed to prefer to have it so.

If Wilford wished it, there was nothing more to be said. She was to be his Sunbeam, and so she made up her mind to be just that. She said once to Isabel, ever so little timidly,—

"Don't you think, Isa, you could teach me a little what to do in a house, because, you know, when you marry, I suppose I shall have to order and all that, and I shall feel so at sea."

"Oh, my dear, you'll never do anything of that sort," said the sister-in-law, with that kind of good nature which is harder to stand than sharpness. "You must have a lady housekeeper then, and Wilford doesn't want you to be bothered. Think about your dressing and going out, May; that's all you're fit for, you sunny little thing."

And Sunbeam had half thought of appealing to Wilford, but recollects it might make mischief, and then Wilford certainly would rather everything went smooth.

But Isabel's presence in the house sometimes oppressed the girl, she hardly knew why; and then Wilford looked worried, sometimes anxious, and once or twice she was shut out of the library when he was there with Isabel. She never showed how wounded she was, but always met Wilford with the same bright smile and sunny humour.

He wondered vaguely now and then, with a quite unreasonable disappointment, whether she had as much heart as he had believed.

She never noticed that he seemed graver than usual at times, but was quite the same light-hearted Sunbeam, shining and shining till he must shine too for very sympathy.

Wilford forgot that he himself had contributed to limit Sunbeam's sphere. She was only good to shine, and so she shone "with unexhausted store"; and Wilford, with the usual blindness of his sex, thought she wanted nothing more than

plenty of love and petting, and pretty things and admiration, to make her happy. Yet, he said, with a sigh, he had need to think there was so much more in her.

Sunbeam was a perfect success in society, and she revelled in the brilliant scenes in which she was called to take part.

Lady Errol was quite the sensation of the year, and Wilford was immensely proud of her, and was seen about with her everywhere. Perhaps, if he had been less taken up with his wife, he would have seen that things weren't going just right with Halbert, and would have noticed signs that now passed unheeded by him. But he was anxious about Hal, and, though he always meant to speak to him and get an idea how things were with him, he put it off from time to time.

Sunbeam claimed his time and devotion, and so the season was slipping by.

The Derby, Ascot, came and went, and Wilford was talking about taking Sunbeam to Goodwood, and then going down to Lougholme, his place, and then abroad, perhaps, as she liked. But all these fine plans were not destined to ripen into maturity.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRASH.

"MR DENNY, Sir Wilford, is in the library, and wished to see you on business," said a footman to Errol, one evening.

Mr. Denny was one of the senior partners in the bank of which Halbert was a junior, and Wilford glanced up. He was on the point of going to dress for dinner, after which he was to take his wife to a reception, and look in on a ball.

"What a bore!" said he. "What can he want. I believe it's Halbert he really wants, and I have to do duty while Hal's away. I'll come, Richard."

"Don't let him keep you, Wilford," said Sunbeam, springing after her husband, and he patted her curls and smiled.

"No, sweetheart," he said, "I won't let him keep me."

Then he went down and entered the library.

"How do you do, Mr. Denny," he said, shaking hands with the elderly banker, who rose as the other came in, and looked anywhere but at Sir Wilford.

"You've come to the wrong man for business, I'm afraid," said Wilford, laughing. "Pray be seated; my brother knows more about it than I do."

"Ah—ahem!" Mr. Denny cleared his throat and fidgeted nervously. "I am afraid, Sir Wilford, your brother is not in a position to be of much use to us. It is, in fact, about him that I came to see you—very painful business—very painful to communicate to you!"

Wilford leaned back, folding his arms across his breast; he had grown pale to the lips.

"Be so kind as to tell me your business, Mr. Denny," he said, putting a strong pressure on himself, "however painful."

Mr. Denny looked at him earnestly, coughed, and grew more and more nervous.

"Bless my soul!" muttered he, "it's the very deuce to tell a man."

Then he gathered courage and said, though he spoke with evident difficulty,—

"This concerns your brother, Sir Wilford. During his absence we have made the very painful discovery that a series of defalcations, extending over several years, have been perpetrated by your brother, bonds to the amount of several thousands have been abstracted, and I grieve to say, just before Errol went away a large sum was withdrawn from your current account, presumably by your cheque, but I greatly fear—." He paused, for Wilford sat rigid, one hand now over his eyes, the other clenched on his knee.

The damp was on his forehead, his blood was gathering chill around his heart. Calamity—dire disgrace—falling—falling on all who bore the name of Errol.

"Have you the cheque?" he said, in a very

level voice, hardly raised above a whisper, and Denny handed him one. "It might be my own hand," Wilford said, Litterly. "Where did the boy learn the trick of the pen so deftly? But I drew no cheques for such a sum. How was it no one thought it strange I should draw such a large amount, above any that I usually require?"

"Well, you see, Sir Wilford, one never knows. We all know there are great expenses, and Lady Errol—ladies are very extravagant sometimes," returned Mr. Denny, with a half apologetic smile. "We can't question a cheque if it looks genuine."

"No, of course not; but my own money, that is, so far as loss goes, the least part of it," Wilford said, in a suppressed way. Then he rose and walked through the room with his hand on his forehead.

"I can hardly take it in yet," he muttered. "I can't think—Hal—that Hal should do this thing. But there must be some mistake."

He said the last words aloud, half turning to the banker, who shook his head sadly.

"My dear Sir Wilford, there is unfortunately no mistake. Your brother—Inquiry before I would speak to you has shown—was deeply in debt; losses on the turf, gambling debts, and others more pressing on him, he became desperate. I find he paid up these before leaving, and you may guess this was, in point of fact, a flight."

Wilford came up to the table; his face was white and set, and he spoke with a sort of suppressed passion.

"Look here, Mr. Denny," he said, "I will make good every farthing of this money, bonds, securities—whatever they are—the owner shall not lose, if it can be kept from public disgrace—it must be. I care not if it costs me all my fortune—it shall be done."

"It wouldn't cost you that, Sir Wilford. But do you know it will make a large hole in it?" said Mr. Denny, impressively. "I suppose you know that Mr. Errol's own share is long ago foreclosed."

Wilford fell back.

"No," he said, with white lips. "I did not know it."

There was a moment's silence, the younger man battling for the self-control he would not yield up, and succeeding in so far as he was able to speak more calmly.

"Tell me what sum—if you can—would cover all deficiencies, both of the bank and these bondholders," he said.

"Well, my dear Sir Wilford, it will run you into between thirty and forty thousand pounds altogether; and then I don't know that you can stop the bondholders from prosecuting."

"I make everything good," said Sir Wilford, "only on condition that the whole thing is kept a secret. Not unless—no one has any claim on me. What I do I do simply to save my brother from disgrace, the name I bear from public shame. I can raise that sum anywhere in the City and settle everything at once. The owner of these bonds will be a fool if he refuses to be paid in full rather than forego the poor satisfaction of putting my brother in prison. You understand, Mr. Denny. I will come down to-morrow with my solicitor."

"It is making an enormous sacrifice, Sir Wilford," Mr. Denny said, tentatively. "Pray forgive me. You, I know, do not understand much about business. You will be crippled for years!"

"I know, I know," Wilford said. He put his hand a moment over his eyes, his thoughts going to that young wife of his. She seemed so little fitted to bear the least reverse, the least diminution of those luxuries she had been lapped in from her cradle. Then he dropped his hand. "Is there any sacrifice too great to save honour?" he said, and Mr. Denny shrugged his shoulders slightly. Perhaps he looked at things with a different eye from the bearer of this proud name of Errol.

"Believe me," he said, "it has been the most painful task I ever had to perform. I am very grieved," said Mr. Denny, as he rose, and Wilford, bowed in silence, gave his hand to the banker, who clasped it warmly. "Good-bye, Sir Wilford," he said. "You will see me, then, to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, yes," Wilford answered.

He saw Mr. Denny himself to the door, then turned back to the library. He almost staggered as he reached the room again, and flung himself down into the chair by the table, bowing his head down on his arm. He had kept up before a comparative stranger. No eye should see his agony, his humiliation. But now—alone—the strain must snap, and Wilford could not but give himself up for a space to the overwhelming sense of such utter anguish as had never yet poured on him.

For this was shame and disgrace—only to be hidden from the eyes of the world at the cost of a sacrifice he had deemed but little if he alone must have suffered. And there was the betrayal of his trust, the base ingratitude that had traded on his affection.

For years Halbert had told him half-truths, had sworn such and such sum would clear him, when they did not half meet his needs. What a life was that which his brother had led! And Wilford blamed himself too, that in these last months he had been so taken up with his young wife that he had paid but little heed to his brother. Yet, what had it availed!

Only a few short weeks ago Hal had told him that a thousand pounds would clear him—a lie! At the very moment he knew that his debts must amount to many times that sum!

At first Wilford could only think of the misery of disgrace, of failure, the bitter wound to his love for his brother. Then it came to him how Isabel would take this—for Hal was her favourite. Then Sunbeam! How could he tell her? How drive the sunbeams from her eyes! How tell her she must forego this or that for the sake of—his brother! Would she understand? Would she not be wretched—his darling whom he would fain shelter from every adverse wind?

He did not hear the door open, so lost in his woful thoughts he was, but started up blankly at the sound of Isabel's shocked voice.

"Wilford, what has happened? What is the matter? I came to see if Mr. Denny had gone—we are waiting. Sunbeam—"

"She mustn't come, she mustn't know," Wilford cried, and sprang to the door and kicked it. "Isabel! for Heaven's sake, let me keep it from her. She cannot bear trouble—go tell her." He stopped, choking, and clasped his hands over his eyes.

"My child! my child!" he said, and bent like a reed before a storm wind.

A kind of bitterness and yet of triumph, flashed up in Isabel's eyes.

"There is trouble then?" she said, "Well, I am strong. I can bear it, and help you. What shall I tell Sunbeam?"

"Tell her," Wilford half whispered, "I—I am busy. I can't come in to dinner, nor go out to-night. I can't see her; she would see something wrong, my poor child! Then come to me, Isabel."

His sister left the room and went up to the drawing-room. Sunbeam was there, softly singing to herself. Her sister unconsciously stirred Isabel's heart to pity.

"May, dear!" said she gently, "Wilford asked me to tell you he is too busy to come to dinner, and would you mind excusing him to-night?"

Sunbeam looked blank.

"Oh!" she said, "it's that horrid bank! Hal being away they come and bother Wil! Then I can't go to-night! I did so want to go to the ball! I'll go to Wilford. I know I'll get him to relent."

She was dancing off, confident in her powers, when Isabel stood in the way.

"Nonsense, May! How can you be so stupid and selfish?" said she. "Wilford doesn't want to be worried."

"Why? Is anything the matter?" said Sunbeam quickly.

"No, no, nothing! Only, don't you know yet, men never like being bothered when they're busy! Wilford said you weren't to come," concluded Isabel, drawing on her imagination.

"But you!" Sunbeam said. There was a queer tightness at her throat.

"Oh, I can help him! I understand about bank things. Now go and have dinner, there's a

good child, and please send in something for Wilford, will you?"

"Yes," Sunbeam said mechanically. She came back into the drawing-room; and Isabel, satisfied with herself, left the girl and returned to the library.

And while Wilford was telling her of the calamity which had fallen so suddenly, and Isabel listened like one turned to stone, his young wife came down quietly to the dining-room, bade the footman take such and such things to the library for his master, made a pretence of eating, then came back to the drawing-room and sat in the growing darkness forlorn and wounded to the soul, on. Into the night. Upstairs in her room lay the ball-dress, the sparkling jewels, she had thought of with so much joy—but she remembered nothing of these now. Wilford had shut her out. She felt something was the matter, and Wilford had said she was not to come. He turned to his sister, not to her.

She was not his wife, but only his toy. She was no use but for sunshine hours; and if there came haply a dark hour, what was she there for? One by one the tears gathered and fell—and Sunbeam—a sunbeam no longer—sat crouched up in the darkness. And no one came to comfort her, or seemed to remember she might want a sunbeam to pierce her soul, from which the sun had all faded.

CHAPTER VII.

"TO SHINE AND SHINE, WITH UNEXHAUSTED STORE."

It must have been near twelve when Isabel came upstairs, moving quietly and calmly across the drawing-room, which was almost in darkness.

"May," she said, "are you here? Why, child, sitting in the dark!"

Sunbeam rose from the big chair where she had been crouching, stretching up her white arms, with a half laugh. She was not going to let Isabel see her hurt.

"Why, I do believe I fell asleep!" said she, suppressing a yawn. "What-o'clock is it? Is Wil coming up?"

"No, child; it's twelve. He says you are to go to bed. I'm going too. He has got a lot to do yet. He'll come presently. I'm just going to tell Richard he can go. There's no one out."

"But is Wilford going to sit up all night?" said Sunbeam. "Isabel, I'm sure there is something the matter."

"There isn't! Don't be silly, May. Wilford will come presently," returned Isabel, decidedly. He won't like it if you don't go up, May!"

"Oh, I'm going," returned Sunbeam. "I'm much too sleepy to sit up for him. Good-night!"

She gave a check, that struck Isabel as cold, to her sister to kiss; then went off to her room.

"She doesn't care," said Isabel, bitterly, "else she wouldn't curl up like a kitten and go to sleep like that!"

Sunbeam, however, was not sleepy, and she had no intention of going to bed. She let her maid put her on a dressing-robe, and sent her away, saying she was going to sit up a little.

"Has Miss Errol come up yet?" she asked, and the maid answered.—

"Miss Errol had. Her light was out, and her door locked."

"I wonder when he is coming!" thought Sunbeam, as the minutes lengthened out; the quarters struck, and at last one o'clock, a quarter, half past one."

"Is he ill—can it be?" Sunbeam whispered. She grew white, and rose up, her heart beating fast.

She was half afraid of her own temerity, for she was a timid little thing about asserting her claims to his love. She knew she was wrapped up heart and soul in her husband, but she wasn't so sure of him. He loved her—ah, yes, that she knew—passionately worshipped her—but was she useful to him? Did he always want her?

She stood pushing her hand through her curls with an anxious perplexed look, and then made a sudden movement, went to the door, opened it softly, and looked out.

The gas burnt dimly on the stairs still; and the girl, with her light, noiseless step crept down, now flushing a little and now going pale.

At the foot of the hall-stairs she paused. The library-door was opposite to her. Suppose he had locked the door, would he be vexed at her coming—think she was frightened to be alone, and so set her further back into her child's niche?

"But I am his wife," she said, softly, with a little thrill, "and I must be brave."

She went forward then, and noiselessly turned the handle. The door yawned. With throbbing pulses Sunbeam went in, closed it, and stood in her husband's presence, her heart in her mouth. For he sat there by the table, his head on his arms, his very attitude so instinct with suffering that, little as Sunbeam knew of such signs, her very quickness of sympathy told her there must be something terrible to bend Wilford so.

It held the girl still, for a moment. She was awed and afraid, not confident enough of her own powers to know what she should do; but either he heard the faint signs of a presence, or knew someone was there by some subtle sense, for he lifted his head, and started to his feet as he saw her.

"Sunbeam!" he said, with a half cry, "you here?"

He made a step towards her, and opened his arms, and then Sunbeam sprang to him and flung herself on his breast, clinging convulsively to him, silent and quivering, choking back tears—for she would not cry—she must not worry him with tears.

And Wilford held her close to him, with Heaven knows what rush of joy, of rest, of an intense sense of communion and sympathy, and bowed his head to hers, yet, all the while with bitter self-reproach for feeling that joy in her being here. She must not be troubled. She must be kept from all sorrow. How selfish it was to be glad she came to him.

"My Sunbeam!" he said, softly, at last, and raised his head only to press his lips to her curls, "you ought to be in bed and asleep long ago."

"I couldn't sleep," she whispered. "You told me to go, but—I couldn't rest. I—Oh, Wilford!" with a burst of passionate tears that quite startled him, "I know there is some trouble; and you shut me out, and think I am too childish to know—to care. You mean to be kind—but, oh, don't you see you are breaking my heart!"

Startled, indeed, to the soul, Wilford, in bitter trouble, pressed the quivering form closer yet.

"My child! my own child!" he whispered, brokenly. "Don't cry so, my Sunbeam! I thought only to save you from sorrow, to guard you from suffering. Believe that, my darling! my poor little Sunbeam!"

But it was some minutes before Sunbeam, heroic little thing that she was, could struggle back to quietness, and then she reproached herself bitterly for having given way.

"It was wrong of me to cry," she said, almost whispered. "And you are in trouble. You see, perhaps it is true, I am too childish to be any use."

"No, no; you mustn't say that, darling!" interrupted Wilford, with passion. "Sunbeam, when I looked up and saw you—ah, you don't know the warm stream that seemed to go right through my heart, through every vein; the joy to see you, to hold you in my arms, to remember your love! You can comfort me, Sunbeam; I know it! I know it!"

A smile like a veritable sunbeam broke over the girl's face.

"Can I, really, Wilford!" she said, softly, looking up into his face, and he, with a blinding mist before his eyes, just dropped his head to hers, and so stood quite silent, in some sort clinging to her.

"I have been very cruel to you, my Sunbeam!" Wilford whispered, quite brokenly; then, "I didn't know. I meant to be kind!"

"Dearest!" the girl said, softly, "I know

that; and, indeed, it was all my fault, because I am so light-hearted. And how should you think that your little Sunbeam could ever want to do anything but dance through life. See, now, Wilford," said Sunbeam in her pretty, caressing way. "I can be a real Sunbeam now. If I give only light, you know, this is only part of a sunbeam's duty. Sun gives warmth, and a little strength perhaps, too," Sunbeam said, as if for her to give strength to this strong husband of hers seemed rather a bold statement; and Wilford could not but smile at her loving simplicity. "And it was so good of you, Wilford, to want to spare me; but, dearest, may I say something?"

"All that is in your heart, my child," Wilford said, tenderly.

He looked with a sort of awe on this transfigured sunbeam of his, into those eyes, so luminous, so soft; into this young face so bright yet so strangely shaded off from its light-hearted brilliancy by the new power that had come into it.

"It made me so unhappy," Sunbeam went on, drooping her head, "to think I was only good for sunshine hours; and, Wilford, I don't think it was jealousy; but," she hid her face. "Isabel," she whispered. "She is your sister, and you love her. She seemed to—take my place. You turned to her this evening. She told me you said I wasn't to come."

She stopped, and Wilford, stroking the dear head against him, said tenderly,—

"I have been wrong, my own darling! It was my love for you that would fain shelter you from a breath of sorrow; and I have given you sorrow in my very desire to spare you. Forgive me, my precious child! I will never so wound you again! You seem such a child to take up the burden of life, my Sunbeam!"

"Oh! no, no! I am foolish, and like a child," Wilford, I know, often," Sunbeam said, wistfully; "but, still, a woman not very wise or intellectual, but able to bear anything to help you; if I can only do it by loving you, Wilford."

"My Sunbeam!" Wilford said, and kissed the soft lips that pleaded so with a passion of love and tenderness. "I think there is more wisdom hidden under those sunny curls of yours than some of us have guessed at."

He laid both hands lightly on her forehead, pressing his head a little back.

The look he gave her took her breath, and made her flush and tremble.

He half smiled.

"Come then, my wife," he said, softly. "I am going to make you sharer of my sorrows as well as of my joys. Come here at my feet," resting himself in a low chair, "and let me hold you to my heart so."

And so nestled into his arms, the girl—with a strange bewilderment of happiness, underlying all the sadness for his sorrow, listened while he told her, with bent head, of the dishonour his brother had brought on his name—of all that dishonour entailed.

"On you, too, my darling!" Wilford said, and Sunbeam laid her face against his without speaking, only her touch and her clinging kiss gave him comfort.

She was a wise little girl after all; and knew in some wonderful way when to speak and when to be silent.

"For, Sunbeam," he went on, after a minute or two, "I am going to make all this money good to save Hal and our name from public disgrace; and that means, dear, that we shall have to do without many things that you have always been used to."

"Will you have to put down your horses, and go without cigars, and clubs, and all that?" said Sunbeam, wistfully.

Wilford smiled a little, and put her curl back fondly from her forehead; her first thought was for him.

"What of your Victoria, and your horse and new gowns, and jewels, sweetheart?" he said, "that, perhaps, you may have to do without?"

"Oh! but that doesn't matter," rejoined Sunbeam, brushing aside these sacrifices as of

no moment at all. "If I don't have anything like that, and go about in cabs, perhaps you could keep your horses, couldn't you, Wilford!"

The man's lip quivered. It was a little time before he could speak.

"You will make me very selfish, dearest!" he said. Then, rather huskily, "Perhaps it may not come to doing without a horse or two; but what I mean is, Sunbeam, we shall have to make serious retrenchments in the establishment, do with fewer servants, must give up our winter abroad, for instance, and perhaps stay quietly at Langholme instead of having a season in town, let this house and have a house near, but not right in the midst of everything, not give big entertainments, not have everything we want just because we want it, and so on. It will be difficult and disagreeable, Sunbeam."

"You won't mind much if your Sunbeam is shilling all the time, will you?" said Sunbeam, brightly.

"It's for you I mind, dearest. What are you looking so grave about?"

"I was thinking, Wilford, wouldn't my jewels bring a great deal of money?"

"You wouldn't like to part with them, Sunbeam, would you?"

She glanced up under her lashes, then bent her head on his shoulder.

"It would be for you," she said, simply.

"My darling!" Wilford pressed his lips to hers, "a true woman's answer. But, sweetheart, I don't think that will be needed. I want you to keep those."

"But, Wilford," the girl interrupted with great earnestness, "you mustn't think of what I said as a pretty child's suggestion; I mean it all. Oh! I would be happy—happy," she cried, clasping her hands, "never—never to wear another jewel if I could help you a little!"

"I know it, my heart, rest content. I believe you would give the soul out of your own body for me, darling!" said Wilford, half sadly, "but I think we need not ask the sacrifice."

"And then, Wilford," the girl said, eagerly, "there are my settlements; couldn't I give those up?"

"You dear child! no. See, darling!" Wilford said, softly, And pressed her face against his breast, "you must remember that you enjoy only what is called the life interest of your settlements. The capital is for those who may, perhaps, come after you. It wouldn't be just to give up that even if you could."

"No!" Sunbeam said, under her breath, and was silent a little while.

"Then can't I do anything real?" she said, after that pause, with a sigh, "anything real I mean, Wilford?"

He smiled very tenderly.

"You can be my Sunbeam," he said, softly, and she flashed him such a look.

She understood now all that enclosed. Once before, when he had said that, she had gone away, and then wept a passion of tears on his breast; now she nestled down to him and repeated half to herself,—

"Your Sunbeam—your Sunbeam!"

"But, she said, after a long silence, "Wilford, I know what I can do. I can pay for all my own things, gowns and things, out of my own money always. That will be a real help, won't it? I must never ask you for anything."

"I shouldn't like that, sweetheart; but perhaps I shall be obliged to bear it," said Wilford, with a smile. "I like you to come to me for everything necessary."

"You like to spoil me," the girl answered with a touch of archness. Then, with a long sigh, "Wilford, if it wasn't for poor Hal, and all the misery he has brought on you, I could be glad that we have not so much money."

"Why, darling?"

"Because," said Sunbeam, "perhaps you would never have thought me anything but a very precious plaything. Now you know I am your real wife."

Wilford could only strain her to him with broken words and loving caress.

"But you will be my own bright, light-hearted

Sunbeam still!" he said, with a passionate wistfulness, and she smiled.

"I don't think I can help singing and taking things brightly, Wilford," she said, over so little sadly. "Perhaps that may be better, because you are older and different, and can't be such a humming-bird, and you'll want me to make you happy."

"You do that, Sunbeam, by just living," said Wilford, and sat smoothing the soft hair from her forehead for a long time—a certain restful feeling coming over the restless gony that had clenched his heart before. He had not known himself how he had craved his wife's presence, her sympathy, her mere touch, all those long hours.

They sat far into the morning hours—sometimes silent, sometimes talking over affairs, he explaining many things which she did not understand, touching lightly on Hale's failings, the unconsciously in question or suggestion showing him how much that was practical and clear lay "under those sunny curls of hers," till at last he said, she ought to get some rest.

"It isn't good for you, my heart," he said, "to sit up all this time and have no sleep."

"If I had been at the ball," she answered, "I should have just been getting home."

"Very like, sweetheart; still, now you must sleep. I haven't any sleep in me, dearest."

"Don't send me away," whispered Sunbeam, tremulously. "Mayn't I sit here at your feet, and lay my head on your breast—so, Wilford—indeed, I will try and sleep."

And so with his arms about her, her head resting on his breast, Sunbeam's white lids fell, the long lashes lay on her soft cheek. Like a child she slept, breathing so quietly he stooped once or twice, to feel her breath fan his cheek.

"My darling, my Sunbeam," he half whispered, so very softly, "what a passionate heart lies here under all the pretty child's ways! What a woman's love and power and self-sacrifice! Darling Sunbeam!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was understood in society generally that Sir Wilford Errol had lost money somehow. It was supposed through the failure of some investment or other in which his uncle had left part of his fortune; and people wondered what that brilliant light-hearted Lady Errol would do without any number of new gowns, and just whatever she fancied.

They need not have commiserated Sunbeam. She took everything with her usual brightness; it made no difference to her whether she had four carriages or one. Wilford had his horse, and so had she, but that was nothing, and if he drew it mild in cigars—not that he ever was a great devotee—she did not know it.

She was happy if he had all she thought necessary. When Halbert's affairs were got through, and all that he had abstracted paid up, Wilford found himself with a pretty heavy charge on his income, which was, in consequence, much reduced. Isabel was often moody and impatient over the necessary retrenchments. She was unhappy, and she was jealous of the position Sunbeam had taken with her husband. Not that Sunbeam, as heretofore, ever interfered with the housekeeping arrangements; less than ever, now the establishment was reduced, and a certain amount of economy necessary, was she able to conduct domestic affairs, and so she gave that meekly up; besides, she would not for the world's hurt Isabel's feelings. Still she managed, in her pretty humming-bird way, to insensibly soften her sister-in-law, and get her to initiate her into some ways.

"So that I shan't be such an ignoramus," said she, "when someone we know of comes and fetches you away."

For certainly Lawrence Brooke, who owned most of the property that lay about Langholme, was inclined to carry Isabel away with him, and Isabel seemed nothing loth.

They spent a quiet autumn at Langholme. Wilford had not much heart for a great deal of gaiety and visiting, and he seemed, at last, to have given up all thought of a social life.

what very little but Sunbeam—she was sufficient. She never failed, was always the bright, loving, winsome fairy about the house, never too brilliant when too much brilliance would jar, never dull or moody or preoccupied—a veritable sunbeam.

"There's more in her than I thought," Isabel said once. It was after Christmas then, and Wilford was talking of going to town. It was terribly dull in the country for Sunbeam. "I used to misjudge her. She seems quite as happy without endless toilettes and admiration as with them."

"Sunbeam isn't vain," Wilford said, with a smile. "She loves beauty and lovely things just because they are lovely. She is the brightest spirit that ever lived. By the way, here is Hal's letter, Isabel. You can read it all. You see he seems to be pretty well settled on the ranches."

"I'm glad he is with Frank Hanley. He'll keep him steady," said Isabel. "Does Sunbeam know it?"

"Yes, I told her. I think, Isabel, you'll have to give up the idea of going out to him. Here comes Brooke again up the drive," said Wilford, smiling, and laying his hand affectionately on his sister's shoulder. "I'm off to Sunbeam."

Isabel, if she coloured, made no demur. She was always self-possessed, and the panic that seizes some girls at the prospect of being left alone in front of a proposal was unknown to her.

Pat, presumably, Laurence Brooke did not find her cold or unresponsive, for when Wilford returned with Sunbeam some time later, Isabel, looking very handsome with that flush on her cheek, was presented to her brother by a radiant young man who claimed her as his promised wife.

"Then," cried Sunbeam, joyously later when they were alone, springing up and down, her hands on Wilford's arm just as her old child way, "we shall have a wedding! Oh, what fun! Being married is great fun, Wilford," said she, nodding archly, and he laughed.

"I am glad you find it so, sweetheart," he said, putting an arm round her and drawing the bony head down against him. "I think you find life 'great fun, don't you?'"

"Oh, yes, with you. Don't you?"

"With you, Sunbeam."

"Such a plague as I am!" said she roughly. "And, oh, Wilford! when Isabel is married! The house, the servants, what shall I do! Won't things be sixes and sevens, and won't you say 'Really, Sunbeam, you must be a little more steady!' Don't laugh, Sir Wisdom. It's what'll happen."

"Not a bit of it. Sunbeam! I shall never 'growl' at anything you do or don't do! Besides, you must have a housekeeper to manage things for you. I won't have you worried with tiresome, household concerns."

"You extravagant Wilford! We can't afford it!" said Sunbeam, demurely, but he laughed and kissed her.

"Don't trouble your sunny head about that," said he. "I'll never smoke another cigar or wear another button-hole, then, if it can't be managed without—not that they cost such a lot, Sunbeam. It's only a manner of expression!"

"You mustn't be always trying to save me what you call 'bothered,'" said Lady Sunbeam, stroking his hand softly. "You make me much—much—too porcelain still, Wilford—"

"You are much—much too precious, my darling," Wilford answered her, tenderly, "to be treated altogether as common clay. You know your mission is to shine, sweetheart, isn't it?"

She looked up with that sweet, serious, tender glance that made those brown eyes of hers look so luminous, and smiled as she laid her head back on his breast.

"Yes—to be—your Sunbeam," she said, softly, and he set his seal to that with his lips on hers.

[THE END.]

TWO LOVERS.

A SHORT STORY.

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

WHY am I engaged to Clyde Halstead? Do I love him? I think so, therefore it is all the same whether I do or not. He is very handsome, this lover of mine, very fascinating, and perhaps I adore beauty all the more because I am a little pale-faced, insignificant creature myself. To be sure I have enormous brown eyes, but they are my only redeeming feature, and the fact that my nose is "tip-tilted" cannot be denied.

We have a certain amount of money, mother and I; there are only us two, so we enjoy ourselves after our own fancy. Just now it has led us for the summer to a breezy little village among the Welsh mountains.

Mr. Halstead has followed us, of course. We have been engaged six months, and are to be married in the autumn.

Mother has never liked him. He is twelve years older than I am, who am eighteen. She says he is attracted by my money, is a black man of the world, probably with debts of honour that his wife's money will pay.

But poor mamma is not strong, and her only daughter is very wilful.

"I shall marry Clyde," I say, "for I love him," so the matter rests.

I am lying in a hammock swung on the shady plaza; presently my Cousin Celestine comes out and takes a vacant chair near me. Mother has invited her to spend several weeks with us, and she has been here a day or two.

Celestine is a thoroughly accomplished woman of twenty-four. Clyde was very much impressed when mamma introduced them; I could see that, though when we were alone he only said:

"How marvellously beautiful your cousin is." She is dangerously beautiful just now as she leans back in her chair. Her gold-coloured hair is coiled in a thick knot at the back, and ripples all over her head. Her blue lawn dress is not so high at the throat as to conceal the faultless neck, and the sleeves are not so long that the rounded white arm is hidden. One jewel, an almost priceless amethyst, glitters on her perfect hand. Verily, my cousin understands the art of dress.

Presently Clyde comes up the steps and approaches us. It does not occur to me that Celestine has from her window seen him approaching and come downstairs to meet him. I am not easily made jealous; besides, I am not well versed in the arts of a flirt—I learnt some of them later.

I rise from the hammock and seat myself near my cousin. It is not a wise thing to do, for my plain face makes a splendid foil to Celestine's superb beauty. I do not think of this now, however.

"Oh, Mr. Halstead!" she exclaims, "how can you venture out in this heat! I should fear speedy dissolution should I attempt it."

"It would not be wise for you to venture," he returns. "I should hardly have gone myself had I realised how warm it is. I have been arranging for a boat ride to-night, if you two ladies will honour me with your company," for the first time looking at me.

"How good of you!" cries Celestine. "I have been eager for a boat ride ever since I saw that lovely lake. We shall be delighted."

I say nothing. Clyde remarks, carelessly:

"Be sure and be ready by seven, Marjorie."

"Thank you," I reply, guiltily, "I don't care to go."

"How provoking you are, Marjorie," my cousin says, pettishly. "You said this morning you wanted a boat ride."

"My dear," I reply, coolly, "I have changed my mind, but that does not hinder you from going."

"Certainly not," says Clyde, eagerly. "Marjorie takes whims sometimes. I have engaged the boat; surely both ladies will not disappoint me!"

Celestine hesitates apparently, and finally laughingly replies:

"Well, if Marjorie won't be jealous I will go." Even I can see how my lover's face lights up, and I answer, calmly:

"Why should I be jealous, Celestine?"

She flushing slightly, and just then mother calls me, and I leave them.

After tea Clyde and I are in the parlour. Celestine is upstairs getting her hat. Presently Clyde remarks:

"You had better change your mind, Marjorie, and go with us."

I feel instinctively that his words are not sincere, that he would much rather I did not go; so I laugh and say:

"No, I am going to finish a book this evening."

And soon my cousin comes downstairs and they go out together.

After this the flirtation progresses with astonishing rapidity. Everyone in the house is talking of it, and in pure self-defence I accept the attentions offered me by other men. There is a certain spice in flirting with an engaged girl, and I do not lack for devoted cavaliers.

Mr. Halstead does not interfere with me nor I with him. Celestine does not mention his name to me, and I never speak to him of her.

Sometimes I wonder just what they intend to do, and if my recreant lover intends to return to his old allegiance in course of time. I am destined to find out. It has been an excessively warm day. I have wandered out into the woods not far from the house, found a comparatively cool place under the trees, and endeavoured to read have innocently fallen asleep. I am awakened by voices on the other side of a group of saplings which hide me from the speakers, and immediately recognise them.

"But, Celestine, my darling, I love you. Don't tell me that my love is hopeless."

"Really, Mr. Halstead," my cousin laughs, musically, "you are too absurd, and considering Marjorie's claims I think you are going too far."

"Never mind Marjorie," he returns. "What can she be to me after having known you? I tell you I love you! Do you understand?" His voice is deep with passion. "Marjorie will forget me in a little while."

I am too angry to be quiet any longer; probably I ought not to have listened at all, but I am human; springing to my feet I walk around the intervening bushes and confront the two. He has taken Celestine's hand in his and is waiting her answer breathlessly.

"Mr. Halstead," I say, and he drops her hand and faces me, "allow me to return your ring. I agree with you; Marjorie will forget that you ever existed in less time than you can imagine."

He is too astonished to speak; the ring drops at his feet. As I turn to leave them Celestine laughs softly.

"What a little tragedy queen it is," she says. "I go up to my mother's room."

"I have broken my engagement," I say, briefly.

While I am telling her about it my cousin enters. Taking my hand, she forcibly detains me as I try to leave the room.

"Let me go!" I cry, passionately. "I hate you!"

"But you won't after a little," she answers.

"Listen; I am going to be married in a few weeks. I knew you were out there in the woods, and knowing Mr. Halstead was going to try his old game I purposely took him where you would overhear his effort. Brother Tom knows him of old. He has heard that I have a little more money than you, hence the scene under the trees. As for love, he does not care one straw for either of us. The only woman he ever cared for died years ago, a victim to his treachery. I am going away next week and Clyde will surely come to you and ask for forgiveness. I came down here at your mother's request, on purpose to open your eyes as to the manner of man you loved. If you choose to take him back you will have the opportunity. As for myself it did not matter. I have flirted all my life and certainly never with a praiseworthy object. Sometime you will forgive me."

(Continued on page 100.)

PARIS's latest innovation in street-lighting is oil lamps. They are not the sort of lamps used a hundred years ago, when the cry was "Aristocrate à la lanterne," but enormous structures that give out 1,000 candle power each.

JOHN LINTON'S WARD.

A SHORT STORY.

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

"STEAMER below. Diner at six."

She had been expecting the news for two days—this particular message every minute of this day; and yet, after all, she found herself in a flutter over it.

There was nothing to do but to wait. Everything else had been done—even the details of the dinner settled days ago.

When the early January twilight fell she went and dressed. It was a pretty, quiet toilet. Jessie Linton had the instinctive taste of a well-bred London girl, and she had spent a good deal of thought on this gown and its accessories. Harry was coming home, and with him the American girl—her father's ward—who was henceforth to make her home with them, and nothing less than a new dress could properly honour the occasion.

She gave a satisfied last glance at her mirror before she ran downstairs. A round-ribbed, supple frame, a rosy, childish face, sweet and peachy and healthy, and a mass of curling brown hair, somehow tossed into a loose coil on the top of her head. Jessie had that kind of hair that you can do anything with. Curls, or puffs, just as it happened, and only a hair-pin or two to hold the whole structure—it was the despair of all the other girls.

A carriage drove up, and the Linton door swung open unchallenged. The two travellers alighted—a tall young man, in as many garments as if he had come from the North Pole, and a small, feminine bundle, who seemed hardly able to move. She had to be almost carried up the steps.

"Glad to see you back, Harry."

Mr. Linton grasped the new-comer's hand in both his, and then Harry Richardson stooped and kissed Jessie. It was all in a breath; there was no time for any feeling of neglect before he turned to his companion.

"This is Miss Vivian, sir. Take her and take care of her, Jessie. She is nearly perished."

"Papa, I am going to take her straight upstairs. You can make your speech afterwards, you know. Papa will make you a speech by-and-by, Miss Vivian: give you the freedom of the house, and all the rest of it; but you don't want it now, I am sure."

Jessie's quick, kindly fingers removed veil and wrappings. The stranger seemed almost incapable of helping herself. Uncarried, she proved to be a little older than Jessie's self, very pale, with hollow dark eyes and heavy black hair. She cowered down before the grate, shaking as if with ague, and held up her small, transparent hands to the brazier.

"Pardon me," she said, and her very lips seemed to be rigid. "I believe I am nearly friend."

"You poor thing!" Warm-hearted Jessie stooped and kissed her. "You must have something at once. Coffe! Wine will be the quickest—only—with a sudden remembrance of the temperance question—"perhaps you do not drink wine!"

"Yes, please," with the very faintest smile.

Jessie ran away with quick, light feet. Below Harry was telling his father:

"A terrible voyage, sir. It has stormed every day since we left New York, and the cold has been intense. If Miss Vivian had not been the pluckiest young woman that I know I should have wished her anywhere else."

"You are not to dress unless you choose," Jessie was saying, as she held the glass of wine to the blue lips. "I will send up your trunks, and one of the girls shall come and unpack for you; but you are just to make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you," in that soft, languid, musical voice.

Jessie left her. When the door closed, Miss Vivian raised herself and looked about. The air of the luxurious room was like June. Beyond

were sleeping and dressing-rooms. She sank back with a sigh of content.

When the dinner-bell rang, half an hour later, Miss Vivian came down alone, and promptly. She paused on the threshold of the brilliant rooms. Voices and laughter came from beyond; it seemed as if all three were talking together. Miss Vivian's pause looked like hesitation; perhaps it was. But it gave her time for one of those comprehensive feminine surveys that take only the flash of an eye. The solid, rich old furniture and the sombre magnificence of carpets and curtains and drapery were brightened by modern touches of pale carved marbles and gleaming crystals and shining mirrors. A small conservatory closed the vista, with no hint of winter in its luxuriant blooms. At right angles a library opened, its wide entrance arch draped with some heavy Persian stuff.

John Linton saw her almost at once, and went to meet her.

"I am not going to make a speech, Miss Vivian—in spite of Jessie's threat—but we are all very glad to have you with us."

Jessie was standing beside Richardson, clinging to his arm, school-girl fashion, and talking with school-girl gaiety. When her father spoke she turned, blushed a little, dropped Harry's arm, and came to her father's side.

"We are very glad," she repeated, with sincere emphasis.

And Miss Vivian said, simply, "Thank you," and they went straight to the dinner-table.

Jessie looked at her with a little surprise. She was not sure whether Miss Vivian had "dressed" or not. She certainly bore small resemblance to the wretched little creature she had unwrapped upstairs a little while ago. She was in deep mourning, and her heavy black dress was artistically guiltless of flounce or furbelow. Around her neck a quantity of white illusion softened the contrast between the dead black of her gown and her colourless complexion. Her hair was smoothly gathered into a Greek knot, low on her head. Nothing could be more simple, and Miss Linton confessed to herself that not many women were more stylish, and she began to be a little afraid of her.

There was not the slightest need. Nothing could have been more simply unaffected than her behaviour at the table. She talked very little, but it was in a quiet, simple, direct way.

"Isn't it a relief to be sure that your plate will not dance into your lap?" Richardson said.

She just answered "Yes," and smiled.

"Miss Vivian is a very good sailor."

"I'm sure I do not know, then, what constitutes a poor sailor. I was so wretchedly miserable all the time that I had very little interest in living or dying."

"She took her daily walk on deck," to Mr. Linton, "when not another lady was out of the cabin."

"I think Miss Vivian stands convicted of good behaviour," in his pleasant, cordial way. "I know of nothing more demoralising than seasickness."

"It is very pleasant to find the instinct of self-preservation praiseworthy, after all. I was quite sure I should die shut up below."

That was every word she said. Jessie sat at the head of the table, and somehow felt left out of it all. She felt like an awkward, overgrown school-girl—over-dressed, too, and that was the worst of all. And then her sweet temper came to the rescue, and she was sure it was all her own fault. She tried to bear her share of the talk, and Miss Vivian did not open her lips again.

Miss Vivian left them very early that evening.

"I am very tired. I am sure you will excuse me," rising. And then to Richardson: "You have so much to ask and tell, I know."

He looked at her. She had a trick of glancing quickly up and then dropping her lids again—a very shy and very charming little performance, only it seems almost too bad to call it a trick, it was so entirely innocent and unconscious. A kind of eager look came into Richardson's face, but Miss Vivian did not see it. How should she with those lowered lids?

Shut into her own rooms, she made her deliberate and luxurious preparations for bed.

"It is all so much, so very much better than I

expected," she thought. "If I had known, I should hardly have wasted three years in waiting on Mrs. Vivian. I thought it would be so different here, and I find nothing could be better. Miss Jessie—well, Miss Jessie is not formidable."

Eighteen years ago John Linton had been left a widower, with this tiny girl baby as all that remained to him of two years of quiet married contentment.

His wife was not his first love—most men's wives are not—and by-and-by, when Jessie was three or four years old, he had brought home this boy, a half-dozen years her senior. He had his mother's eyes—the eyes that had once answered love to John Linton's looks. The two children grew up together, and were hardly conscious that their relationship was less than that of brother and sister. Jessie had been her father's housekeeper for the last two years, and Harry had come to be Mr. Linton's right hand business man.

Three years before, James Vivian, an old college friend, had written John Linton from the home that he had made for himself in America. He was dying, he wrote; by the time that his letter reached its destination his daughter would be left with only her step-mother among comparative strangers.

The girl was the daughter of an Englishman; such relatives as she had were on this side of the water. He begged Linton to act as her guardian, to take her into his home if possible. Following close on the letter came the news of the writer's death.

Linton wrote at once; he surmised that the two ladies did not live quite harmoniously. The reply was a very gracefully-worded note to the effect that Mrs. Vivian's health was uncertain, and the young lady felt it to be her duty to remain with her. Linton concluded that he had been mistaken. He received and answered two letters a year from Miss Vivian, and so the matter rested.

At last intelligence came of Mrs. Vivian's death. It happened that Harry Richardson was in America on a business trip. He was directed to put himself at the young lady's disposal, and wait her convenience. She delayed him a month, and they came back together through the January storms.

So Miss Vivian found herself at home in the Linton household, and half wondering at the unquestioning and unbounded hospitality of her welcome, still she received it with small token of surprise or even recognition.

Jessie was born housewife. Everything in her small domain moved with magical precision. Happy and healthy, with a wonderful gift of activity, every minute was full of work or pleasure. She saw a good deal of society, too, in a quiet way—always under her father's escort.

During the first week of Miss Vivian's stay in the house the relative positions of the two girls seemed to define themselves. It passed Miss Linton a little. Her guest never intruded herself. She was perfectly and contentedly quiet; stayed in her own rooms a great deal of the time; hardly made her presence felt in any of their domestic arrangements; and yet somehow Jessie was always conscious of her. Not quite happily, and yet she could not define the discomfort. Nothing could be sweeter or simpler than her manners.

Jessie had thought she might find herself nervous about her housekeeping, and she found that Miss Vivian not only did not know but did not pretend to know anything about it. Her toilets—she made toilets, Jessie found—were altogether too simple to account for the length of time they took, and she never was critical—in words at least—of other people's dress. Her deep mourning prevented her accepting the invitations that included her with Jessie. She protested against interfering with any of their ways, and so at last there was no more said about her going. Only she was rarely ever left alone.

Mr. Linton had always been Jessie's escort, but now occasionally Harry Richardson took his place. Often, however, it was Harry who stayed at home.

One evening there was to be rather a grand wedding reception. Jessie had talked about it for a week, and her dress had come home three days before. She had ventured on somewhat unusual magnificence—a pale peach silk with a good deal of tails about it, and a quantity of moonstone jewellery in odd silver settings. Harry had found it somewhere over the water, and Jessie had been reserving it for some grand occasion.

Miss Vivian looked at her after she was dressed without a word. The girl was conscious of a steadily failing condition of the mental barometer which had marked satisfaction a few minutes before.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Your hair. It is so pretty, and you can do anything with it. It is a pity to spoil your toilet by dressing it that way."

"What shall I do?"

"Will you let me try?"

"Of course I will."

"You see your dress, in the gaslight and in a crowd, will be only a faintly pink, shining cloud. Your hair was never made to be twisted into those stiff braids. It is prettier by night than by day, and that can be said of very few girls' heads. Look!"

She had unbound the obnoxious braids while she talked, and had brushed out the shining, waving mass. Then, with a dexterous turn or two of her wrists, she had gathered it all into a careless knot low on her head.

"It looks as if it were going to fall," anxiously.

"You will see that it won't—not a strand. Wait a minute."

She went to her room. When she came back, over the shivering ripples that caught the light of themselves she dusted just the least suspicion of gold powder, secured the whole soft call with a crystal arrow, and professed herself satisfied.

"Don't you see, it looks as if you had done it in five minutes. It shows that every bit of it is your own. There isn't probably another girl in your set that dare trust her hair in any such fashion. You can dance all you please, dear; it will neither come off nor down."

Jessie went away with a new idea forming itself in her head.

It was Mr. Linton who had remained at home this evening. Miss Vivian went back to her room, and sat down with a book. It lay unopened in her lap, though, as she sat with an air of listless waiting.

A summons came before very long.

"Mr. Linton is in the library, miss. If you are not especially busy, would you come and play a game at chess with him?"

Miss Vivian rose slowly and went down to the room where her guardian waited. He rose with a smile of genuine pleasure as she came in.

The chess-table was drawn before the grate. The drop-light burned with a softened radiance. It looked as if there was a long, quiet, pleasant evening before them.

She seated herself in the chair he gave her, but seemed not to be thinking of it. A little air of abstraction had settled over her. Mr. Linton waited, watching her with good-humoured patience. He spoke at last.

"Well, Miss Vivian, I dislike to interrupt a lady's train of reflection, but—"

"Oh, yes, I was thinking," with a little start. "I have something to say, and did not quite know how to begin."

Another pause.

"Well!" suggestively.

"Yes," nervously, and then by a visible effort steady herself. "Of course, Mr. Linton, I know that papa left but very little money; that most of that was used during mamma's illness. There cannot possibly be enough left to keep me dressed as I ought to be, if I remained in your house, with a desperate burst of confidence. She went on again: "I think perhaps you could put me in the way of doing something for myself. I don't quite know what I can do. I haven't much education—at least of the available kind. The best thing for me would be perhaps to find a place as companion with some quiet lady."

She was sitting with her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes on the fire. He did not answer her

at once, and she looked up at him, as if surprised at his silence.

He was regarding her with a kind of pitying smile on his lips. Apparently she misunderstood his expression.

"You think it is absurd! I do not understand your English ways very well, perhaps."

"Not that. I hoped you had been happy with us."

"I have been. It has been such a blessed rest before going out to what must inevitably come," with a quiver in her voice.

"I think you are misinformed about your money. It is not a very large fortune, certainly, but it is a good deal more than you ought to spend on your wardrobe, unless you are a very extravagant young lady."

"Which I am not."

"Why not make your home with us! Jessie is as good a girl as one will find anywhere, but she has grown up quite by herself. She has seen very little of the world. In some ways she is very unformed. If you were to stay with her—"

"You think me so very worldly-wise, then?" with a little deprecating smile.

The game of chess was begun late, and was prolonged beyond its usual limits. It was deep in the night when Miss Vivian said "Checkmate," and sat a minute contemplating the scene of her victory.

She put away the pieces in her careful, orderly way. She rose and said good night, and then paused suddenly.

"There is one thing, Mr. Linton, if I consent to stay. I must not be made to feel that any one in the house is going out of his or her acquaintance way for my sake. Your staying at home to-night—you have denied yourself a pleasant evening on my account."

"My dear Miss Edith!" he protested, "I am growing an old man; a quiet evening at home now and then is by no means a hardship."

"I fear few of your friends would excuse you on the plea of old age;" and then with a sudden impulse—and Miss Vivian was not given to impulsive—she extended her hand.

"You have been so very, very kind to me."

The tears gathered slowly in her eyes while he held her hand for a minute. Miss Vivian was not given to tears, and her great soft eyes were very beautiful.

It was only a day or two after that Harry Richardson came back to the house in the middle of the morning. It was rather an unusual hour for him to appear, and no one was expecting him. Clearly, Miss Vivian was taken by surprise.

"Mr. Richardson!"

"Edith! How long since you felt yourself constrained to be so entirely formal in your address! It was quite another thing when we were on the steamer."

"It was all so different," pleadingly. "It was an indifference. I suppose I cannot ask you to forget it."

"Do you want me to forget?" vaguely. "Edith, I do not understand. What has changed you so!"

"Everything has changed. I am here among strangers. They are all very kind, so much kinder than I have any rights to expect. Do you want me to bring discord and trouble among them at my first coming?"

"How can you bring trouble?"

"Why did you never tell me about Jessie?"

"I did tell you."

"But how! I fancied her an unformed school-girl, and I find her old beyond her years, the acknowledged head of the house. Do you want me to break her heart? Girls of that stamp are quite capable of it."

"Break her heart!" in pure amazement.

"What do you mean?"

She looked at him half unbelieving that his stupidity was real. Her steady gaze brought some sort of comprehension into his mind.

"Jessie is my sister."

"There is not the slightest tie between you."

"She has never thought of it. We have always been brother and sister."

"Mr. Linton has not forgotten the truth at all events."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing," sullenly.

"And is this the end of it all? You told me—at least you let me think that you loved me."

"It is generous of you to remind me. No, impulsively; "It is I who am wrong. You were always thoughtful and kind and good. But what can I do? It is my only home; if I embitter them against me, where can I turn—what can I do?"

"But you are wrong, I am sure. And if you are not, what does it matter? We have a right to each other."

But when did a man's impassioned pleading ever avail against a woman's cool determination? Richardson went away only half satisfied and yet appealed for the time, and Miss Vivian was a little absent-minded and sober all day.

With the summer months were not so very much changed. Little by little, as the able cloud of grief cleared itself out of Miss Vivian's wardrobe, her social talents began to be recognised. Jessie felt the added charm of her presence on the occasions when she herself played hostess. She had always been a little timid about it before; now she was nearly as self-possessed as her companion. I think even to herself she had never called her a friend. There was always that nameless chill of reserve between them.

Apparently, Richardson was not so happy under her influence. He was moody and restless. Both Jessie and Mr. Linton saw and wondered at the change, without in the least comprehending the reasons for it. Miss Vivian never betrayed herself, and she managed with complete adroitness to avoid him. Sometimes, in spite of herself, she was forced to see him by himself for a little, but, try as he would, their relative positions changed very little.

When the summer came, the real, brilliant summer weather and summer heats, as usual, the Linton household was closed for a season. Mr. Linton was an indefatigable business man, and Jessie's seasons had usually been spent at some resort where her father could join her for the last of the week. But this year they were taken quite away. Mr. Linton spent a week with them, and went back to the city, reluctantly it seemed, but only half promising to come back for a while, later.

To one who did not know that Miss Vivian was still in her first year of mourning the suspicion would hardly have presented itself that her wardrobe meant even mitigated grief. A great deal of white and some soft grey and an absence of showy jewellery—"a quiet taste in dress" that was hardly noticed in the charm of her manners and presence. For Miss Vivian had the finished repose of a thorough woman of the world, an infinite tact that was never at fault, and a sweet grace of speech that was never at loss for silvery replies to the most provoking or ill-bred talker in the little world of women at the seaside resort.

Before they returned, Richardson had decided to go to America again on some business connected with the firm. He told them of the decision himself, coming in on them unexpectedly one afternoon. They were playing croquet, under difficulties, on the small terrace kept level with a constant struggle against the sea wind and beach sand.

Jessie looked up from her game and saw him coming with the little group of arrivals from the last train.

"Oh, Edith," she called, "Harry has come. Miss Sprague, if you would just take my mallet for the rest of the game."

And she ran down to meet him before he reached the steps, and within five minutes knew why he had come and when he was going away. Miss Vivian did not come up till the game was finished. She was surprised, but not overcome.

Richardson was looking pale and thin. Some nameless trouble seemed haunting his eyes and voice. Jessie had seen too little of grief to understand; she only vaguely felt that something was wrong.

The next day was Sunday. In the early afternoon Harry and Miss Vivian strolled away down the sands. Jessie had supposed her spending the afternoon after her usual drowsy fashion, and was just preparing herself to go down for a long talk when she saw them go. She found that the surprise was half pain, too.

There was a lovely full moon that night. It came swinging up through the sunset tints that flushed all the East. She stood watching it when Harry touched her shoulder. She did not know that he had returned.

"Get your shawl," he said, "and come with me for a walk."

Poor little Jessie! Before she came back that night she had heard from Richardson's own lips a story that made her grow pale and shrink with a nameless pain. And yet, when she came to think it over, there was less told than implied.

Harry Richardson loved Edith Vivian. There had been a few weeks when he had believed that she loved him in return. But for all these months, ever since her landing, she had put him off, soothing him with vague protestations when she could not escape him; and now to-day, when he would no longer be evaded, telling him with cold frankness that she did not care for him any longer; that life had changed her; that he must give her her freedom wholly and unconditionally.

"And yet, oh, Jessie, she does care. I do not believe her. Some terrible ambition has taken possession of her. If she ever loved me, she loves me now. And yet what can I do? I should be less than a man to trouble her, after what she has said."

He threw himself down on the sand beside her, and laid his face against her arm as he used to do in the days of his boyish despair. And, as then, he soothed him with soft touches and silence.

"My little sister," he said at last, with his voice broken by a sob.

Jessie felt very much like echoing the sob herself, but she choked down the pain. It was the very last time Harry Richardson gave any woman a chance to hear him wail over his lost love.

They went back to the hotel. If Miss Vivian looked at them a little curiously as they came in, it was the only sign she gave. Her manner was quite unchanged.

Jessie used to wonder at her after that. Harry's name came into their talk just as naturally and just as often as ever. She must have known that Jessie knew, and yet she gave no token of it. There never had been much confidence between the girls, so it was idle to say there was less now. Their apparent relations were the same. But one day, after they had returned home, Jessie stood up alone in the middle of the room and said aloud—she had shut the door first:

"I wish Edith Vivian's father had not died."

And all there was to provoke such a remark was the fact that she had left Edith Vivian seated in the library, beside the grate-fire, in a particularly easy chair—Jessie's chair, and Jessie's place in the old days, but Miss Vivian never seemed to know it—with her father opposite, while she herself, after fidgeting about on the outskirts of the group, with a curious feeling of being one too many, had escaped from the room and taken refuge upstairs.

It was about a month after that, and Jessie had fallen into her first sweet sleep, when a light shone on her eyes and roused her. Miss Vivian stood beside her in her pretty evening dress. There had been an evening parlour concert, and Jessie had remained at home.

"Are you asleep? I want you to waken, dear."

"Yes," Jessie said, still drowsily.

Miss Vivian sat down beside her on the bed.

"I have something to tell you. You will not like it, I fear, and yet I must tell you. Try and be just to me, Jessie."

The girl heard the slow, careful words with a paralysed feeling that some terrible blow was coming, with a powerless sense of being unable to avoid it, as one has in a nightmare.

"Your father has asked me to marry him. I have promised him that I would."

She lay still a minute before she could realize the significance of the communication; the calm, still face was unchanged, the dark, inscrutable

eyes fixed on hers. At last she gave a kind of gasp, as if coming back to consciousness, stirred a little, and sat up in her bed.

"I quite understand you," she said, coldly. "You can go now."

Miss Vivian absolutely stared for a breath. Then quite coldly she walked out of the room.

In her own room she walked up and down the floor a few times with firmly-folded arms.

"There will be no scene," she said, aloud.

She was right. Jessie was, as Miss Vivian had said, old beyond her years. She accepted the situation with a composure nearly as perfect as the lady's own.

The wedding took place on the anniversary of Edith Vivian's coming to Mr. Linton's house. It may have been simply chance that chose the day. Jessie saw in it a design too malicious to be forgiven or set down to thoughtlessness.

To everyone's surprise, Harry Richardson was back to the wedding. He landed a day or two before the event. Jessie was alone in the house when he came.

They looked at each other for a minute silently.

"So there is to be a wedding!" he said, with a half-smile in the words.

Jessie hid her face on his shoulder.

"What made you come?"

"My dear, would you have me miss so happy an occasion? I am sure Miss Vivian would have felt hurt at my absence."

The wedding was, in a stately and sober fashion, a very grand affair. From the first Miss Vivian had petitioned for a quiet ceremony. It certainly was not John Linton's wish that half London, as it seemed to Jessie, should be interested in the proceedings. But the great church was crowded to its utmost, and the bride's dress was magnificent in its quiet richness. There was no parade of bridesmaids or floral decorations, nevertheless the occasion was a marked one in the social annals of that circle at least.

Jessie had developed a quiet pride that surprised herself. Before the wedding her father—half-remorsefully, it seemed—had arranged everything that could make her life independent of the new condition of things. She had her own apartments and her ample allowance. The two women rarely met except at meals and in public. Their treatment of each other was irreproachable. Canscious lookers-on found their mouths completely shut. Mrs. Linton matronized Jessie with her perfect tact, and never did nor said a word that could touch the radical discord between them. Richardson was abroad most of the time. His home was in the house, as of old, on his brief visits. His manner to Mrs. Linton was scrupulously polite. If there was a sneer under his deference she never seemed to know it.

Just a year, and then Mrs. Linton was again the centre of public observation.

One day John Linton was brought home dead. A street accident, a falling wall, an item in the morning paper, and an obituary sketch, and all the world had changed to darkness for Jessie Linton.

The funeral was hardly less imposing than the wedding had been. Mrs. Linton was quite calm through it all. She was not less elegant in her widow's dress than in her bridal robes, and there was not one who did not pity her as she stood beside the grave—they had intimated on going out with the others, white and still and childlike-looking.

The two women lived on together. Both had an instinctive desire to avoid gossip, and there was no reason why they should separate. But the two years that hardly touched the sombreness of Jessie's dress had somehow by almost imperceptible changes eliminated much of the crisp from the older woman's

There was nothing to be found faint with. There was nothing showy in her attire. No one could point to an unbecoming fold in her dress. She was not gay; she never forgot her position; yet Jessie felt a silent antagonism growing in her heart.

The summer before his death Mr. Linton had

country. They were there now—Mrs. Linton and Jessie.

The house was full of visitors, young people mostly, and if there was little brilliant gaiety in the days, still Mrs. Linton entertained faultlessly, and there were also no stinted opportunities for flirtation.

Among the guests were Mrs. Gaston and her son—Americans, old acquaintances of Mrs. Linton in her former life.

Richardson was at the house one evening. He came occasionally. It seemed to Jessie that in Mrs. Linton's manner to him there had been a change. She was no longer coldly indifferent. A half-timid, pleading tone came into her voice at times—a look of depreciation, instead of the level, slightly surprised gaze of former days, when he said the harsh things that had become habitual with him now.

He did not shun women, but they were afraid of him. All but Jessie; he never sneered at her, and rarely in her presence—too openly. But she never for an hour forgot that Sunday night by the sea.

A slight rain had been falling all the afternoon, and all the Linton guests were gathered in the parlours or on the broad balconies opening from them. The Gastons had been with them three weeks, Richardson since yesterday.

Felix Gaston had been talking with Jessie half an hour. He seemed especially to affect her society—a preference by no means mutual. Mrs. Linton had come up at last, and with a word had swept him away with her, to Jessie's intense relief. She leaned back in her chair and looked out across the darkening river.

"Don't you like it?" It was Harry's voice. She gave a little start, and looked up at him gratefully.

"Are all Americans like that?"

"Isn't that enjoyable! Mrs. Linton thinks so."

"Harry!" answering the tone rather than the words.

"Look here;" he wheeled the revolving chair in which she sat. At the end of the darkening parlour two figures stood alone, relieved against the faint brightness of the French window. It was her step-mother and Felix Gaston.

There was nothing that all might not see, and yet Jessie caught her breath sharply.

"Oh, Harry!" And then—she did not mean to—"Do you care?"

He coloured to his brows.

"Yes," he said, bashfully. "I hope you will try and understand that. A woman for whom I have no respect, in whom I have no faith, has the power to give me a heart-ache that haunts me night and day. Your father's wife, my dear."

Jessie hid her face in her hands with a sob. It was not often her composure failed; when it did there were tears in a torrent.

Mrs. Linton came out.

"What is the matter?" she said, sharply. "Your presence seems to have a very disturbing effect," to Richardson.

"On whom?" with a bitter smile. "Not on you, nor your amusements, madame."

"Oh, Harry!" half under her breath.

Jessie could not see, sobbing behind her handkerchiefs, the quick, shy, soft upward look, the tender, grieving curve of the fine lips.

He flushed again, stirred uneasily, and turned his back.

That night Richardson sat smoking late, until the house was quite still. A shaded light burned softly in the tower where Mrs. Linton had her room. He sat and watched it till the night waned.

There came a step behind him—a soft, light step; a dark-draped figure stood by his chair.

"It is I," putting out a white hand. "I could not sleep till you had told me that there was peace between us."

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Linton. Has there ever been anything else?"

"You are very cruel," she faltered. "Have you forgotten all the past?"

"I have not forgotten that you were the wife of the man to whom I owe everything that I know of a father's care. Pardon me, do you



"HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALL THE PAST?" SHE PALTERED.

think your presence here, at this hour and under the circumstances, quite—in good taste!"

She answered him with a smothered cry.

"You do love me!" she said.

"Yes," quizzily—"a love that means neither respect nor faith. Do you care for that? I do not understand women's tastes very well. Had you not better go in now? The night is damp."

He rose and gave her his arm as ceremoniously as if they had stood in a crowded ball-room. There was nothing to do but take it, and let him lead her back to her own room.

Not a shadow of that scene on her face next morning. She answered the mocking light in his eyes with a look as calm as a child's.

But he was restless and moody all day. He was gay by fits, and when Harry Richardson chose he was the magnetic centre of every room he entered. That had been Gaston's speciality heretofore.

All at once, between the two, a sudden diallike seemed to spring into being. Jessie became conscious of an under-current of deeper meaning than the dancing, singing troop of summer visitors seemed to guess.

"I am going to stay a week," Harry said to her. "I am going to see the end."

"What do you mean?"

"Wait and see."

And Jessie waited. She was not a very prominent figure in Mrs. Linton's household. She had too little heart in the galeties of the day. She went her own way quietly, and saw more than anyone dreamed of.

Mrs. Linton seemed hovering between the two men, whose diallike to each other was no secret to anyone in the house. In the tact that prevented open rupture that others praised, she found a deprecating appeal to Richardson, and to Gaston a claim on his personal regard. She passed over it. Harry would not explain, only smile. She seemed in those days to be walking in the midst of veiled and masked figures, whose relations to each other were as mysterious as all the rest.

One evening the social atmosphere seemed overcharged with electrical influences. There were fewer guests in the house than usual, and everyone felt nervous and excited, as if before an impending storm. It had come to open hostilities between the two men—as far, at least, as two well-bred men of society can manifest that state of things in a lady's drawing-room. Mr. Gaston and his mother were to sail for home in a few days; they were talking about the journey.

"Do you remember your voyage when you came from America?" Richardson put the question abruptly to Mrs. Linton.

She quailed for an instant, but her composure came back almost at once.

"Very distinctly."

"Should you like to repeat it under the same circumstances?" in a tone that jarred on Jessie's nerves. She tried to speak, to divert the talk, and the words would not come. Mrs. Linton was very pale.

"Hardly," she said. "I remember that it stormed every day that we were out."

"That was in January. June is a much more comfortable month."

There was nothing in that, and yet everyone felt a little thrill, as if there were danger near. Gaston rose with an undisguised frown. Richardson looked at him with that exasperating smile, and turned to Jessie.

"Have you ever been on the bridge on the hill road at midnight?"

"Dear me, no," with a vain attempt at being at ease. "I have too much regard for my own comfort to be exploring the country at that hour of the night."

Mrs. Linton was white as a ghost. Jessie leaned towards her.

"Edith"—it was seldom enough that the name crossed her lips—"I want you to play the accompaniment for that new song of Henchel's, Miss Reeves, I am sure you will like it. Harry, you are to sing with me."

At midnight a closed carriage stood on the bridge on the hill road. A dark-wrapped woman's figure came up the path leaning on a man's arm.

"Is it all right, driver?"

"All right, sir. Just a minute. There's a buckle loose."

In the minute another figure came up the path carelessly, quite as if the situation was a matter of course.

With an oath Gaston seized his revolver. There was a slight click; Mrs. Linton threw herself forward.

"Don't disturb yourself," Richardson said, coolly. "Mrs. Linton will need another wrap. At least I supposed you had forgotten it. Permit me," opening the carriage-door.

He assisted her in, while Gaston stood stupefied.

"You are sure you are entirely comfortable?" with his hand still on the door.

"Thank you. You were always very thoughtful," in a voice as cool as his own.

"They have gone."

Jessie had been waiting, as the little note that followed her when she left the parlour that night had bade her, and then she heard the whole story.

Three years later there was a quiet wedding in the Linton parlour. Harry Richardson is a perfectly contented and well-to-do member of the community, and Jessie has as few regrets as women ever have. As I said, men do not often marry their first loves.

[THE END.]

THE Yeomanry are usually the lightest worked of our Volunteer forces. Six mounted parades, six dismounted drills, and ten days' permanent duty a year are all that is required.



ADELA SAT GAZING AT THE LETTER, HER HEART FILLED WITH A DEEP JOY.

TWICE CHOSEN.

—10.—

CHAPTER III.

LORD CARRUTHERS' OFFER

THREE years passed rapidly by, leaving no especial landmarks behind, but bringing with their flight the natural changes which needs must be in this impossible-to-stand-still world.

Adela Thorndyke had grown more beautiful; the child was exchanged for the woman, and yet there were glimpses of Scamp still discernible in the outbreaks of wilfulness and sudden perversities—in the old mischievous, half-naughty, wholly winning ways, in which she had won hearts to her.

And she went on winning them. She had more lovers at her feet than any girl in the county, and one of them was now a subject of contest between her and her father. Lord Carruthers was all which a girl's fancy might picture—tall, well-made, and handsome; rich, pleasant, and honourable; and yet Adela would not accept him.

He had been that very morning to the Rectory, and had enlaid Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke's sympathies in his suit.

They were both exceedingly pleased at the prospect of having so charming a man for a son-in-law, and gave him a warm and hearty permission to ask their daughter for her love, with but little doubt as to the result, as they looked upon the man's animated face.

Adela was reading in the self-same tent which she had three years before pronounced stifling, and there his lordship found her, having left the Rector and his wife with glad hearts in the study of the former.

"Adela is a very lucky girl!" said Mrs. Thorndyke, when the door closed upon their visitor; "we could never have hoped for a better match."

"No, indeed, it will relieve my mind of a

great weight. I am not a rich man, as you know, and I feel my health to be failing; it will be a real happiness to me to see our child well settled in life."

"And to me also; but Edward, you must not talk of failing health at your age. Why are you not fifty yet, and I could not spare you, my dear!" and she laid a gentle hand upon his arm.

"You would not be asked. You see, wife, when a man's time comes whether he be old or young, rich or poor—has dear ones who would fain keep him, or none to mourn his loss—he must obey when he is called from hence."

"May you not be called then, Edward!" she said with a sad smile, and he had stooped and kissed her.

"If I were not here, dear, Adela would ask you to make your home with her, I am sure," he continued; "and I should die content to know that you were both provided for."

"But, Edward, you are surely not ill!" replied his wife, tears welling to her eyes.

"Perhaps not," he returned, with a strange smile. "I hope I may be spared; I am not tired of my life, Mary, dear."

She slipped her fingers into his, and they stood by the window, hand in hand, watching the tent upon the lawn.

"Adela has rejected many good offers, but she can expect nothing better than to become Lady Carruthers," said the Rector, abruptly leaving the former subject. "I suppose she will come in and tell us her good news, dear Little Scamp! I am thankful she is to have a happy lot. With a disposition like hers she will feel both the joys and the troubles of life acutely. As Carruthers' wife, few of the latter will, I hope, come in her way. And now I must see to my sermons. This is Saturday, and I am seldom so late with them, but I have felt disinclined to buckle to, to write or think, all the week, and now Scamp's lucky fortune has unsettled me; but I must use my will, and put thoughts aside, that is, *second* ones," he added, with a smile, turning to his

table, and sitting down before a quire of half foolscap.

"May I sit with you, Edward?" asked his wife. "I won't talk to disturb you, and perhaps Lord Carruthers will come back himself to tell us. I should like to be here if he does."

"Very well, Mary," said Mr. Thorndyke, "I don't feel inspired to begin yet," he ended, with a smile, "so you will not hinder me, I daresay."

But Lord Carruthers did not return. He found Adela sitting alone in the tent, leaning back in a lounge chair, with a neat little shoe and high-bred instep peeping from the folds of her cream-coloured dress.

She was looking sweetly pretty, her fair skin catching a tinge from the ruby velvet with which her costume was trimmed, and her well-turned wrists and white hands fully shown beneath her half-cut sleeves, trimmed with falling lace.

Her saur eyes wore a far-off look, and she started when Lord Carruthers stood before her, and a slight expression of vexation crossed her speaking face; but the next moment she had risen, and received him, if not with warmth, yet with politeness.

"Did you not find my parents in?" she asked, as she indicated a chair.

"Yes, I have seen both Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke," he replied, "and have had a pleasant interview with them, and now I have come to torment you, Miss Adela. I am a humble petitioner!"

She looked up inquiringly, no shadow of his meaning falling across her mind. She wanted to be alone—to think—so his visit was unacceptable, that was all.

"A petitioner!" she repeated, smiling. "Well, Lord Carruthers, you may be that, but don't ask me to picture you a humble one, at any rate, for I could not do it."

"Could you not? And yet a man must needs plead humbly, when he is asking for his life's happiness!" returned his lordship, gravely.

She did not answer him, and a flush rose to her cheek, as he continued,—

"Adela, you surely cannot be taken by surprise at this avowal. You must have seen that ever since I came from abroad last year I have loved you."

"I have not seen it," she returned, hastily. "Had I done so—"

He interrupted her.

"Hear me out, dear girl. Your parents have given me permission to speak freely to you, and have desired me to tell that they wish nothing better than to see you my wife!"

She turned very pale, but did not again attempt to check his words, and he drew his chair close to her side.

"Adela, you are the love of my life!" he continued, earnestly. "Will you come and be my brightness? My dear old place will be no home to me without the woman of my heart to share it with me; to jay with me in my joys, and to sorrow with me in my sorrows. Adela, you will not refuse me this happiness. You will be my wife!" and he took the soft white hand into his own.

"I cannot," she said gently. "Forget that you have asked what I must refuse."

"And why?" he queried with emotion.

"Because, Lord Carruthers, I do not love you. We have been good friends; let us remain so, please."

"Adela, do you love anyone else?" he asked, with sudden pain.

"I do not know that I do," she returned, thoughtfully. "A preoccupied heart is not the only reason for not caring for a man in that way."

"Then you do not forbid me to hope?"

"Yes, I do. It is of no use for you to let hope tell you a flattering tale, Lord Carruthers. I like you too well ever to love you," she added, qualitatively. "And now think of it no more!"

And she looked honestly in his face, pressed the hand which held hers, and quietly withdrew it from his grasp.

"Not think of it!" he echoed. "Adela, you can never have loved to speak thus lightly."

"Perhaps not," she answered. "But I think I should have the strength of will to forget if I tried."

"No, no, not if your love were as deep as mine for you, dear girl! I have so hoped; my every thought of the future has been filled with pictures of our joint happiness; our mutual joys; and now you say forget, as though the word held no pain for me."

"I am sorry to put you to pain," she replied, laying her hand upon his coat-sleeve; "but it is kinder to tell you the truth at once than to let you dream of a future which can never be realised. Some other girl, more worthy of your love, than I am, will brighten your home and cheer your heart with a fuller affection than I could give you, and make you a better and more yielding wife. I should have to love very deeply to make a man even fairly happy. I am wilful and exacting by nature, and intolerant of control. It is all right here at home; they do not discover my faults, because I always have my own way. With a husband it would be different."

"Adela, if that be all, let us try. You shall have your own way, my darling. Heaven knows that I should wish it!"

"No! I would not do. I should despise you if you were weak; and yet I feel that you could not be my master!"

You would resent it if a man attempted to become that, surely?"

"Certainly, if I knew it—I should kick over the traces at once," she said, with a laugh. "Lord Carruthers, if ever my love is won, and kept, the gather will be a very clever man. His reins must be of the finest silk, and strong as iron. If once I see them, good-bye to his influence! Don't you think you are well out of it, my friend?" and she gave him a bright, heart-throb look.

"No, I do not. I believe you to be high-spirited, but as true as steel; you will not scare me with your sketches of character. I shall watch, and wait, and hope still."

"Do not," she entreated; "it will only end in disappointment!"

"Adela, I value the prize too much to give it up without a struggle," he said, earnestly. "I can never turn aside from seeking you while you are free."

Then he held out his hand to her, and as she laid hers upon it he stooped impulsively, and touched it with his lips.

The action had been as quick as it was decided, and the girl had no time to show annoyance, for no sooner did she recognise the fact that he had kissed her hand than she knew that he was gone.

"Edward," said Mrs. Thorndyke, suddenly, "Lord Carruthers is going away. See, he is marking for the gate, and he looks upset; I do hope Adela has not refused him."

"Refused him? impossible! my dear!" but he pushed his virgin paper aside, and did not appear so assured as his words seemed to imply.

"But he is gone!" continued the Rector's wife in agitation.

Mr. Thorndyke joined her at the window.

Yes! his lordship was gone! There was no sign of him anywhere, and the gate was swinging to and fro, as if it had been opened and shut with haste and impatience.

"I wish I knew what she has said to him," went on Mrs. Thorndyke, uneasily.

"Very well, my dear, let us go and find out; it is impossible for me to write with my mind in this state of uncertainty and chagrin—I shall have no sermon ready for to-morrow."

"Never mind, preach an old one," returned his wife, with a smile.

"Turn over the tub, eh? Well, I believe many men do so once a year—one old clergyman I know told me honestly that was his system, and his parishioners knew his sermons by heart and would tell you what was coming each Sunday."

He was putting his papers together as he spoke, then opened the French window, and, slipping his hand through his wife's arm, preceded her to the tent.

They spoke as they walked along, and their voices reached Adela.

She sat up with an *evil* look, scented opposition.

"When Greek meets Greek" she murmured. "They will seek to persuade me that it would be for my good—and they may be right—but Adela Thorndyke never breaks her word. I promised to wait! I can hold my own against papa."

By that time the Rector stood in the entrance of the tent, and was looking at her gravely.

"Adela! why did you not keep Lord Carruthers to luncheon?" he asked.

"I—I. I don't usually issue invitations without knowing your views, papa," she said, carelessly. "Had you wanted him to remain I suppose you would have asked him yourself!"

"We expected to meet him again, dear," began Mrs. Thorndyke; "we were greatly astonished to see him going out at the gate!"

"I don't know why you should be! He does not often stay to meals—he is not a tame cat, like Horace!"

"Like Horace! certainly not," retorted the Rector. "Carruthers is a very different class of man."

"I have nothing whatever to say against him," replied the girl, coldly.

"Against him! I should think not; there is nothing but good to be said of him!"

"I did not know he was such a prime favourite," she returned, with a smile. "Now, Horace—"

"We do not want to talk of young Lake," said Mr. Thorndyke, irritably. "He is a very good sort of young fellow, but if he were to ask for your hand to-morrow I should say 'no' to him."

"Without reference to my views!" and she let her eyes meet his.

"I should think such reference unnecessary. You could not consider Horace a suitable husband!"

"How do you know, papa! Did you ask anyone's opinion when you chose mamma?"

"No, I did not; but the cases are different."

"Different! What, because you are a man, and I a woman? I cannot see it in that light.

We have as much to loss or win in choosing husbands as you can possibly have in selecting wives; but it is just like you lords of the creation, to think we should be bought and sold like slaves!"

"Adela! if I really thought you loved Horace Lake, if I considered him necessary to your happiness," began her father, in agitation, "I would put my own wishes aside."

"And let me have him!"

"I could not cloud your life."

"You old dear!" she cried, starting to her feet. "I only wanted to make you say something sweet and nice. I know you would if I ran you in a corner," and she threw her arms about him in her old impulsive way.

"And do you care for him, my child?"

"Care for him, you wise old thing, of course not," she cried, again smothering him with kisses. "I only care for you, and you ought to know it, and you will find it very difficult to get rid of me, I can assure you."

A look of pleasure rested for a moment upon his face, but he quietly dismissed it.

"My dear, you are fencing," he said. "You led me cleverly off the track with your will-o'-the-wisp Horace, but it won't do; you know as well as I do that your mother and I did not come here to talk to you of him."

"No!" she answered with well affected surprise. "Well, if you are going to remain for a chat you must have this cosy chair," and she pressed her father into it with gentle strength, while she drew her mother to the only other seat the tent contained; and having made her sit down, flung herself at their feet with a graceful movement, rested her head against her mother's knee, and slipped her hand into her father's. "Now," she asserted, "if I am to be talked to I'm ready!"

"Why did Lord Carruthers go away, Adela?" questioned her mother, smoothing the girl's bright hair.

"That is best known to himself," she returned, a flush creeping to her fair cheeks. "One does not usually ask a gentleman why he comes, or for what reason he leaves, when he pays a morning visit."

"Adela," said her father, "your badinage is irritating. We came to ask you a simple question, and we want a sensible answer."

"Oh I like that, dad, are you?" she said, smiling up at him. "I'm so sorry, for I know by myself one feels bad in that condition, and I'm quite sure Lord Carruthers is not worth one unpleasant word between us."

"I am grieved to hear you say so; he is a very fine fellow, and I like him immensely."

"So do I, for the matter of that; he is nice enough, take him all round."

"My dear child," struck in Mrs. Thorndyke, in a deprecating voice, "do be serious!"

"Never was more so in my life, even during one of dad's best sermons. I'm deeply interested—deeply!"

"Adela! you're enough to provoke a saint!" exclaimed the Rector, hotly.

"Meaning you, dear dad!" she laughed brightly.

"I really shall be very angry with you," he began with veritable annoyance; but Adela was now on her knees before him, her golden head upon his shoulder, her soft white hand smoothing out his care marks.

"No! you never were that in your life, darling!" she said, softly. "I'm still your own little Scamp, and I ever shall be. It is too late to change now, dad," and she raised her saucy eyes to him, full of love and confidence.

"Small witch!" he muttered; "it must have been just such a girl as you who made poor St. Anthony look up from his good books. Scamp, Scamp! will you ever be a woman, and face the stern realities of life?"

"Soon enough," she returned, sadly. "I don't want to begin before I can help it."

"But Lord Carruthers," reminded Mrs. Thorndyke, breaking in.

"Of the line again! Adela, what a tactician you are! Yes, Lord Carruthers. Why do you lead me from the subject?"

"Simply because I do not wish to broach it. His lordship is nothing to us; why should we

talk of him! People are not pleasant themes of conversation—it is too personal!"

"Of course it is personal," said her mother. "Adela, Lord Carruthers asked our consent to his proposing to you."

"That was very straightforward of him," she returned, approvingly.

"Of course it was."

Then there was silence.

"Well!" resumed Mrs. Thorndyke, interrogatively.

Adela looked at her.

"And did he?" continued her mother.

"It is rather a mean advantage to take of a man to tell of an offer, is it not?" she returned with hesitation.

"Certainly not, in this case," replied her father. "He proposed, of course! And you?"

"I was highly flattered, equally of course. Now don't you think I should jump at the chance of becoming a countess!" she asked, wickedly.

"I should hope you were not mad enough to refuse such a man, with such a position," returned her father, warmly.

"Is there any insanity in our family?" she asked, quaintly.

"Insanity! Why?"

"Because I did refuse Lord Carruthers, papa refused him absolutely and irrevocably. I did not say 'no' in a manner which meant 'ask me again,' but I told him plainly it could never be."

"Adela, it is too bad of you," said Mrs. Thorndyke, veritable tears starting to her eyes. "You will never get such a chance again, and we wished it so very much."

"Do you really want to get rid of me, mamma?" asked the girl, her smile dying out.

"No, child, not to get rid of you," replied her father, not unkindly; "but to throw away such an opportunity really does seem a pity, and Carruthers is such a good fellow. I'm sure he expected his dismissal as little as I did. What reason did you give him for your refusal?"

"I do not love him, father, and I told him honestly I never should do."

"How can you tell that?" said Mrs. Thorndyke, eagerly. "Love grows, and yours do so."

"No. Love is an inspiration, not a growth," she replied, in a low voice. "It comes without your will or knowledge. It cannot be cultivated, believe me."

"And pray what do you know about it?" asked the Rector, regarding his daughter in surprise. "I'm aware you have had lots of fellows after you, but you have assured me you do not care for any of them."

"Nor do I."

"Yet you have your definition of the article by heart!"

She had flushed beneath his scrutiny, but she was not beaten.

"You forgot the yellow-coloured novels," she laughed; "it is easy to borrow sentiment."

"Very easy," he answered tartly. "Adela, some day I hope you will become more sensible. Carruthers will not give you up lightly. I know the man, and I yet hope to see you his wife!"

"Yes!" chimed in her mother, "it would make us very happy, dear. Try and like him, there's a good girl."

"Fancy trying to like one's future husband," she laughed. "No, no, it really would be that, mamma. Put the idea from your heads, you two old dears—I shall never become Lady Carruthers!"

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN!"

ADELA THORNDYKE had heard but little of the man she loved during the last three years, but she knew she was not forgotten by him; for in every letter he wrote to her father, he sent her a kindly message, not warm enough to raise a suspicion of the truth in the Rector's mind, but sufficient to let the girl know that she was remembered.

Not once had he penned a line to her direct, and yet Adela felt he would come back, if she kept her word and waited. As if to reward her

faith in him, scarcely had her parents left her than a servant came and placed a missive in her hands, and her heart leaped, for she knew the writing.

It was from Cecil Egerton, now promoted to the rank of Major! It was not a foreign letter, as those to her father had hitherto been, but written upon ordinary paper, and stamped with a penny stamp; moreover, it bore the postmark of London.

Long the girl gazed at it in a tremor of happy doubt. Was Cecil really in England, when she had believed him far away in the sunny East?

After awhile she broke the seal with eager fingers and read the following lines:

"MY DEAR MISS THORNDYKE,—

"I have been very ill, and have been sent home to England on sick leave. Will there be a welcome for me at Winsthorpe if I come down? I do not mean from my old friend the Rector, but from the bright-eyed child with whom I smoked the calumet of peace in the ancient walnut tree. Scamp, have you kept your promise? If not, never again could I bear to visit the old place, haunted by memories of your winsome ways! Send me one line to the Army and Navy Club, Piccadilly, and by it I will be guided, whether I inform the Rector of my return or no. —Yours ever,

"CECIL EGERTON."

Adela sat gazing at the lines before her, her heart filled with a deep joy, when a merry laugh sounded close at hand, and Lillian Freemantle stood before her.

"I have been watching you," she said.

"Spy!" retorted Adela, with a bright look.

"Were you repaid for your trouble?"

"Amply; I've learnt a secret, Scamp! How sly you have been!"

"I? I do not understand you!"

"Don't you? Dala, who is that letter from?"

A deep flush suffused the fair girl's face, as the dark eyes of the other were fixed upon her, and Adela did not reply.

"It is short for a love letter," continued the young lady, with an air of authority; "but it is one for all that."

"O! I know that, from the vantage ground of your superior knowledge."

"Of course I do; have you any news for me, dear?"

"Regarding yourself? No, not to-day, Lillian. You must not be greedy, and he must not be imprudent. If I receive too many letters, it might be commented upon; there are disadvantages in growing up!"

Lillian sighed.

"If it were not for you, dear old girl, I should be utterly miserable. He is coming home, but I shall not be allowed to see him, unless you can manage it for me!"

"I'll do my best."

"You always do, you dear old pet; and now about yourself. Why were you looking so strangely happy when I caught you, Dala?"

"Because I felt so," she returned, shyly.

"Is that all I am to hear?"

"Yes, that is all to-day."

"Shall I know more soon?"

"I hope so."

Then the two girls waited, each for the other to speak.

"Adela," said Lillian, after a pause, "do you know people are saying you will be Lady Carruthers some day. What a lovely little countess you would make!"

"Do they? Well, they are mistaken, Lili," she answered, quietly; "the position wouldn't suit me at all, and Lord Carruthers knows it as well as I do!"

"I am so sorry. Then you don't think he will ask you?"

"I am sure he won't," she returned with a smile.

"Then I can't think who it can be with, Dala, but there's no doubt he's in love; he's so absent, you can't keep his attention fixed!"

"Perhaps it's with you, Lili!"

"With me? No, my affections are settled!"

"But he is not to know that."

"I'm sure he might, by my manner."

"Your manner! Why, you're the veriest little flirt I ever saw!"

"You're a nice sort of friend, Dala," she laughed. "If I'm a flirt, what are you?"

"I'm not sure. Do I flirt?"

"Rather! why, how you make Horace bow down to you!"

"Oh! yes, of course; he knows which side his bread is buttered."

"So do most people, but it is not that. Horace loves you for yourself!"

Then the girl suddenly looked up.

"What has become of the handsome Captain who was here three years ago? You never mentioned him, Adela, and I have meant to ask over and over again!"

"Oh! he's a Major now!" she returned, with burning cheeks.

Lillian looked at her keenly, then broke into a silvery laugh.

"Lies the wind that way!—In the East, eh! He went to India, did he not? If you won't give me full information concerning him I shall ask the Rector, and tell him the reason for my interest in him."

"And what is your reason?"

"Your blushes, Adela. Shall I consult your father as to their origin?"

"Don't, Lillian. I'll tell you all I know—Major Egerton has returned to England."

"And is coming down!" cried the other, eagerly.

"I never said so."

"No, your tongue did not, but your cheeks did. Adela, I've known you too long—you can't deceive me. I dare say that letter was from him! Was it?"

"Perhaps."

"And was it that made you happy?"

"I won't be confessed," she cried, starting to her feet, and placing the letter in her pocket. "Come in and have lunch with us, and I will walk home with you afterwards."

"Will you? You are nice. I should like both, of all things."

"Well, then, that is settled. To tell you the truth, I am rather in disgrace to-day, and I shall have your presence at luncheon as a godsend."

"Bad Scamp! What have you done now? Your parents are such old dears, I cannot take your part if you have vexed them. You should live with my father for a week; he would make you jump!"

"No, he wouldn't; I should manage him," she laughed.

"Well, confess; what have you done? If you don't I'll ask Mrs. Thorndyke."

"She would not tell you if you did; and now, dear, come in."

The two girls went into the house, and Lillian Freemantle took off her hat and jacket. She was decidedly a handsome blonde, and made a striking contrast to Adela's fair beauty.

Her eyes were dark and sparkling, fringed with long black lashes; her complexion olive-hued, warmly tinted with carmine; her face oval, her teeth dazzlingly white and somewhat large.

In fact, she was altogether an attractive, dashing-looking girl, and one not to be passed by without notice.

As soon as luncheon was over, which somehow lacked the ease which pervaded the household generally, Mr. Thorndyke retired to his study, and after a few minutes Adela crept away to write to Major Egerton.

She only sent him one line; but it took her a long time to make up her mind what to say, and longer still to decide that what she had written would do.

She merely wrote:—

"I have not forgotten," and signed it "Scamp."

Lillian Freemantle was the best-hearted girl alive; but she was decidedly inquisitive, and Adela had scarcely left the room when she really did ask Mrs. Thorndyke what was the matter; and she, poor woman! was but too ready to get a

listener to her troubles to withhold her confidence ; and before Adela returned, Lillian had heard the whole story of Lord Carruthers' offer, and her rejection of him.

When the two girls went upstairs to put on their hats Lillian took her friend by both hands, and looked her full in the face.

" Oh ! you silly young puss ! " she said, her dark eyes dancing. " I know how you vexed your parents this morning ! How could you refuse such a man as Lord Carruthers ! "

" Who says I ever had the chance ? "

" Come, my dear, give up trying to deceive me ! I have heard the whole story from Mrs. Thorndyke ! It is useless ! "

" It was not fair of mother at all ! " returned Adela, warmly. " If I were a man I should deeply resent a girl's telling I had proposed to her ! "

" So should I ! But you have not done so ! "

" No ; but mamma has ! "

" It is safe with me, Dela. You might have trusted me."

" No, Lillian, not with other people's secrets ! "

" But you were so silly about it ! "

" Was it ? Then it was not for my own sake ! "

" Why, you made out he did not care for you ! "

" No, not quite that ! I said he would not ask me to be his countess ! "

" Because you had already refused."

" Just so ! "

" Decisive—decidedly ! " said Lillian, with mock gravity. " And oh ! Adela, how could you ! It would have been such a splendid match ! "

" Yes ! of course it would ! I appreciate its advantages ; but I cannot avail myself of them ! "

" Ah ! I see ! You are too romantic to desire baronial halls, and all that sort of thing ! You want love in a cottage, and Cupid as cook and housemaid. Usual food, which mounts up butcher's and baker's bills, will not be required. You will live on the sweets of life, and thrive on them, pronouncing yourself intensely happy in your lover's elysium."

" Lover's fiddlesticks ! Don't talk such nonsense, Lili, or I shall think you moon-struck ! " said Adela, laughing. " No, I am afraid I too well appreciate the good things of this life ; but they may be too dearly bought ! Lillian, it makes me tremble to think what I should do if I were married to a man and found I did not love him. I verily believe I should do something dreadful—cut my throat, perhaps ! "

" Oh ! no ! " coolly suggested the other.

" That would be more satisfactory by far ! "

Then the two pairs of eyes met.

" Lili, what nonsense you talk ! " said Adela, with a smile.

" My dear, the same thought was passing through my brain concerning you ! " replied Lillian Freemantle, smiling too. " And now if you have finished titillating, we had better start. My ! you are a time dressing ; and I have a stern parent at home, remember ! "

" I like you, Lili."

" Of course you do, but what called forth the sentiment on this especial occasion ? "

" Why, you have been standing before the glass ever since you came upstairs, gazing at yourself from time to time like a female Narcissus ! and I verily believe, like him, enraptured with your charms ; while poor little I have had to dress in the corner, regardless of my hat being all on one side ! "

" With your braids to match, Dela ! "

" You're complimentary."

" Not at all. I asked for information. Have you answered that letter ? I suppose you stole away for that purpose after lunch ? "

" And thinking me safely out of the way, you treacherously pumped my dear, weak-minded mother, and made her commit a breach of confidence ! "

" Not a bit of it. I was doing you a friendly action ! "

" Me. How ! "

" Why, if I had not kept Mrs. Thorndyke amused she would soon have wanted to know what had become of her ewe lamb ; and would

probably have sought you, and found you writing love-letters."

" I have not been writing love-letters, and mamma as in better training than that ! "

" Oh, is she ? I wish my father was ! "

" You give way to him too much, Lili," decided Adela, buttoning up her glove.

" I'm obliged to do so. He scares me. He makes such a noise if I don't obey him at once."

" Why don't you make a noise, too ? He would soon get tired of it."

Lillian looked at her with open-eyed wonder.

" My dear, the place would be like a bear-garden. I couldn't ! "

" It would be an unpleasant sort of remedy for you both, perhaps, but it would cure him. You allow him to be quite a tyrant to you ? "

" That is really substantially true, with the exception of my allowing him to do it. I'm awfully afraid of father ! "

" I'm not a bit ! "

" It is well that you are not. Dela, would you beard the lion in his den ? Would you come to my rescue, if ever he found out ? " she said, earnestly, laying her hand on her friend's shoulder.

" Of course, I would. I will go and ask his consent now if you like ! "

" No, that would never do. My boy must get on first. He must have enough to keep the wolf from the door without help from papa. I'm not sentimental, Dela, but the cottage would content me very well with him."

" Oh ! And Cupid as *chef de cuisine*," laughed Adela.

" My dear, I really must go," announced Lillian decided.

" In other words, you prefer to change the subject," suggested Adela. " Well I'm a generous enemy ; I'll let you off. I've been ready this half-hour—but you are such a girl to talk."

" Talk ! Why I can't get in a word edgeways if you're within a mile, and you know it."

" I know you're a horrid little wretch ! " cried Adela, catching her, and giving her what she called a bear's hug. " And I cannot imagine what he or anyone else can see in you."

" My dear Dela," retorted Lillian, " it is a mystery to me why Major Egerton—" but Lillian Freemantle's speech ended suddenly, for her friend had made a rush for the door, and had flown downstairs like a lapwing, to avoid the retaliation she knew she deserved, and Lillian had to follow her without finishing her broken sentence.

Mrs. Thorndyke was in the passage.

" What are you girls going, girls ? " she asked, as she saw their outdoor garments.

" Yes indeed ; I expect I shall be scolded as it is. I didn't know I should stay here to lunch."

" Tell Sir Richard to scold me instead," said Adela. " I should rather like it for a change."

" That's a challenge, Mrs. Thorndyke," remarked Lillian. " You spod Dela ! "

" I don't feel sure you are not right," returned the Rector's wife, half sadly.

" Send her to the Hall for a month. Papa will get her in to fine order for you."

" Would he ? " replied Adela, with dilated nostrils, and a defiant look. " I'm not so easily kept in order, I assure you ! "

Then she turned and laid her cheek against her mother's with a loving gesture.

" We never try that sort of thing on, mumsy dear, do we ? " she said.

" I don't think it would be muchuse, my child," replied Mrs. Thorndyke, kissing her.

" And we quite understand each other, don't we ? " continued the girl, coquettishly.

" Yes, generally, dear ; and now good-bye."

" Good-bye, Mrs. Thorndyke. May I come again soon ? " asked Lillian.

" Certainly, my dear ; we are always pleased to see you," and after a friendly kiss the Rector's wife watched them down the drive and out of the gate.

" Your mother's a dear old thing ! " said Lillian warmly.

" That she is, especially when she lets out my secrets," said Adela, wickedly. " And now, Lili, do you know how far I am going with you ? "

" I know how far I should like you to go."

" And how far is that ? "

" Why, all the way, of course, but I know as well as possible where you will stop."

" Where ? " demanded the other.

" At the post-office, of course."

" Why should I ? There's a letter-bag at home."

" A letter-bag at home ! " echoed Lillian.

" Of course there is ; so there is at the Hall, but those are only for ordinary letters, my dear child ! "

" Oh ! that is how you manage, is it ? "

" You know how I manage everything. I'm not so close as you are Dela."

" I'll go right home with you if you like, Lili. So much for your suppositions."

Lillian looked at her watch.

" All right, you will still be in time for the post on your way back," she laughed.

" The post ! You're post mad," said Adela.

" I've a good mind not to go another step with you," but she went on for all that as far as the massive gates of Maraden Hall, and as she returned she walked close by the wall of the post-office, and dropped a letter into the box.

(To be continued.)

TWO LOVERS.

—or—

(Continued from page 392.)

I break from her and go to my own room ; I am learning something of the ways of the world. At night a delicately tinted, perfumed note is brought to me. It reads :

" MY INJURED DARLING.—Only let me see you, kneel at your feet, beg forgiveness, and explain."

" CLYDE."

Bah ! It sickens me. I tear the note into fragments and write :

" How dare you address me ! Don't presume to write or speak to me again. Henceforth we are strangers."

" MARJORIE."

This note, with whatever he has given me, I put in a package and send to him by the chambermaid. Then I go back to mamma and urge her to leave the place at once. She consents. Our maid packs the trunks, and the late train bears us away. I say good-bye to Celestine.

" Some day I may thank you for this," I tell her, " but not now."

It is my twenty-first birthday, three years and more since I last saw Clyde Hainstead. I hear he married a widow several years older than he, and such a life as they lead !

Celestine is married, and I worship her boy. She is a model wife and mother. Such girls sometimes make the best of wives. She says she feels that the good she did during that flirtation counterbalanced a multitude of sins. Oh, well, I have forgiven her, but my heart is bitter towards all men.

Mother and I are living at home in London. It is a bitterly cold day. Mother says :

" You had better have the chaise, Marjorie."

" But 'no,' I tell her. " I am tired of riding, And I start out on foot for a shopping tour.

The wind blows a gale, the crossings are very slippery, and hurrying across one street to escape a vehicle I slip and fall, spraining my ankle badly. Speedily the usual crowd gathers. I cannot walk, am nearly fainting with pain, and rendered half frantic by the crowd. A gentleman passing in a gig stops to see what the trouble is, recognises me, and instantly I am lifted into his vehicle, and am speeded homeward.

My rescuer is a wealthy bachelor friend of my mother's, a handsome, stately gentleman on the "sunny side of forty." I have never dreamed of him as a possible lover, he is so much older than I.

It is a long, tedious month before I can walk

again, and Hugh Cameron is a frequent visitor. He reads to me, plays chess with me, and in many ways helps to make the time pass pleasantly.

At last I am strong again, able to go out; but he still visits at our house, is sometimes my escort, and one day an officious lady friend informs me that it is generally understood that we are engaged. I am angry. I have never thought of him in that way. Besides, have I not vowed again and again that I will never marry?

Next day Mr. Cameron asks me to be his wife and gets an angry refusal.

"Why need you have said this?" I ask impatiently. "I like you, but not that way. We were having such pleasant times. You might have known we could be nothing but friends."

"How should I know?" he asks, quietly.

"Because I don't love you—never shall," I reply.

"Don't you, little girl?" he says, laughingly. "Well, you will some time, when you are my wife."

His audacity nearly takes away my breath.

"But I tell you I will not be your wife," I repeat.

"You may change your mind, little one," he replies, coolly, and then he leaves me.

How angry I am! As usual, I go to mother and pour out the whole story. Mother says very little. She only remarks:

"Mr. Cameron is a noble man, and would make you an excellent husband. But of course you know your own mind."

I leave her rather more out of humour than before. If she would only scold, or do anything but take matters so quietly, I should like it better. I don't take things quietly myself and it exasperates me when other people do.

For a week I see nothing of Mr. Cameron. Then I learn that he has gone away.

I don't care. I can dance and ride; but I miss him so! He is so different from the society of young men with whom I am surrounded. I discover a thousand excellencies in his mind and character now that he is gone. I do not love him, but I am lonely without him.

One night, six weeks after his departure, his card is handed to me, and I go down to find him waiting for me in the parlour.

"Well, Marjorie," he says, coming forward and taking my hand in his, "have you reconsidered that 'no' of yours?"

What shall I say? I am tired of the world and the life I live in it. I like Mr. Cameron, I respect him. I have missed him sorely, but I do not love him. These thoughts flash through my mind as I stand there. At length I draw my hand away and say this:

"Mr. Cameron, I respect and like you, but I do not love you. Years ago I was engaged to a man whom I thought I loved. I learned that he was deficient in all traits of character that go to make up true manhood. Since then I have never been able to clothe any man in the robes of my ideal lover. Knowing this, if you desire, I will be your wife."

He stoops and kisses my forehead.

"When you love me, my darling, I will take my first kiss from your lips; and, oh! my dear one"—his voice trembles a little—"I will make you so happy! I will love you so tenderly that surely some time your heart will answer to mine."

And so we are engaged.

He is a strange man this Hugh Cameron; few men would care so to win a wife; and I think sometimes as the wedding preparations go on how great his love must be.

We have been married three months, and my husband has never kissed my lips. He is kindness itself. No wish of mine is ungratified. Everything that money can buy is mine, but I am not happy. My husband remembers that I have married without loving him and this stands between us.

He seems to think that expressions of affection on his part would weary me, and every day he is growing dearer to me. It is not possible to see day by day what an unselfish, noble character he is and not love him. But he is strangely proud and he waits for my love, not annoying me meantime with demonstrations of his own.

There comes a day at last when I know that I love him, even as he loves me.

I am sitting at the piano, playing some dreamy old melody. The door is suddenly thrown open, and my French maid, Marie, stands before me, wringing her hands and sobbing.

"Oh, madame, Monsieur Cameron—he is killed—he is dead!"

The room seems to whirl around me, but I command myself.

"Hush your crying, Marie! What do you mean?"

"Oh, madame, I saw him—it was awful!"

"Will you tell me what you saw?" I say, sternly, grasping her arm with a force that frightens her.

"The new mansion—at the corner," she gasps—"a stone—it fell on monsieur as he passed"—her voice sounds far away, the room grows very dark, a voice rings in my ears, "he is killed—he is dead!"—and I am conscious of nothing more.

"Why, little wife, open your eyes. I am not hurt."

The well-known voice, and the powerful ammonia, which I hate, bring me to my senses speedily. I am lying on the lounge; Hugh is holding my head, while Marie applies the ammonia. I sit up.

"What does it all mean?" I ask.

"Only this," my husband answers. "I was passing the new building at the corner, when a marble window-sill fell. I should have been instantly killed, but by a strange Providence at that instant I tripped on a loose brick and fell. The sill missed me by a hand-breadth. Marie supposed—when I fell that I was killed, and—looking severely at her—"without waiting to ascertain, rushed off and frightened you into a fainting fit."

Marie begins to cry.

"Never mind, Marie," I say. "There is no damage done; you may go now."

After she has gone I turn to my husband.

"Hugh, it would have killed me! Oh! my husband, I love you," and I too begin to cry.

A wonderful light leaps into his eyes.

"Marjorie, my darling, is it true?" laying my head on his shoulder. "Look into my eyes, little one, and say it again."

I blush like a girl as I look into the fond eyes gazing into mine and reply:

"I think I have loved you a good while, only Marie was the means of showing me how much."

"At last! My darling, my darling!" and his lips meet mine for the first time.

We sit there in the twilight, saying but little, a great peace settling upon us, the bliss unutterable of perfect love filling our hearts.

And so it is now. There is silver in my hair, and my husband's is quite grey, but the love that was revealed to me that day has never grown less.

[THE END.]

A NEW way to destroy rats on board ship is to fill the bilges with carbolic acid gas contained in cylinders. As the gas has no odour, the rats do not perceive that it is being released from the tubes; and another advantage is that it causes no harm to the vessel or the contents of the hold. This method was discovered by finding a number of dead rats near a cask of fermenting molasses.

It is often wondered why short men are, in many cases, more able than their tall brethren, but there is a natural reason for it. Tall men, as a rule, have bodies out of proportion to their lower limbs—that is, smaller than they ought to be—with the natural result that they are unable to bear fatigue, or to compete in the struggles of life with lesser men more harmoniously proportioned. Army experience bears out these observations. In a long and fatiguing march the tall men usually fall out first, or succumb to campagging, unless, as is very rarely the case, they have well-knit and symmetrical frames. A soldier between five feet five inches, and five feet eight inches or nine inches is usually the man most capable of bearing the strain of life.

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME.

—o—

CHAPTER XXXV.

TAKING THE HEAD OF THE TABLE.

"MRS. SARTORIS, do you really mean to eat me, to-night?" Ralph Armitage asked, his voice harsh with pent-up feeling.

Violet remembered that he had saved her life, when she was flinging it away without a thought or care, and stopped as she was about to pass him on Cyril Landon's arm.

"Certainly not, Mr. Armitage. You seem to forget that this is not the first time we have met this evening."

"Are you going to dance with every other man but me?"

"My card is almost full, but I have the twentieth to spare if you would like to have it."

It was only a square, but it was accepted joyfully, and they passed on.

"What is the good of promising to defend you from him if you give in like that?" asked Cyril, in earnest remonstrance. "The fellow doesn't deserve it."

"Recollect that if it hadn't been for him I shouldn't be here now," with a deprecatory smile.

"Webster was there, and I'm sure old Milton would have plunged in after you with pleasure, so Armitage needn't have interfered."

"You are as unreasonable as Lord Balfourer!"

"Why? What has that young fellow been up to?"

"Oh, nothing!" with a slight blush.

"Like his impudence!"

"What is?" innocently.

"I don't know," laughing, "but I'm sure he wants snubbing."

"Like most men," mischievously.

"Perhaps; but there are exceptions."

"I haven't found one."

"Violet, you ungrateful little minx! I'll deliver you up to Armitage's tender mercies the next time I come across him."

"Do, and somebody else will rescue me before five minutes are over!" nodding defiance.

He was delighted to see her so cheerful, and drew her out to the best of his ability, and when they parted a few minutes after the waltz was over, he met Lady Stapleton, who said to him,—

"What a comfort it is to see the dear child so bright to-night!"

"Yes, isn't it? I could fancy she was a girl again, in the old house in Richmond-Terrace. What glorious games we used to have of hide-and-seek!"

"Yes, and how happy she might always be if that husband of hers would not always be playing that horrid game still. Do you know, I think we shall hear of him soon. I dreamt of him as vividly last night."

"What did you dream? That he came back and they were both happy again afterwards?"

"No, I thought one of our friends, a man whom we are quite intimate with, was taken up for his murder. Horrible, wasn't it?"

"Not our *bête noire*, Armitage?" with a smile.

"I never could see his face, though I tried over and over again, there was always a cloud upon it. Now do go, and ask that poor Arabella Macartney to dance. I've done my best and introduced her to dozens of men, but all to no purpose, their cards are sure to be full if they see a plain face!"

"I'd dance with an Aunt Sally if you wished it," with a polite bow.

"You are a dear boy!" and the victim was at once led up to what he called "his sacrifice."

But the plain Miss Macartney turned out to be a remarkably pleasant girl; and when Cyril Landon, who was very particular, began the waltz with a sinking heart, he found that she danced exquisitely. Her face lighted up when

she spoke, and a bright smile made him forget her plainness.

Before the dance was ended he asked permission to put his name down for another, and was quite loth to leave her till several couples were already standing up for the one quadrille of the evening, and he recollects that he had promised to dance with his own dear little wife.

He fetched her from the sofa, where she was sitting by General Forrester's side, and looked about everywhere for Violet and Ralph Armitage. When he found them at last, he saw that they had already secured a *vis-à-vis*, and as the places on either side were filled, he had to take up a position at some distance. Lord Belfether was nowhere to be seen.

Cyril kept an uneasy look out for some time but was relieved to see that Violet still looked tolerably happy. Armitage's stern face had brightened wonderfully, but the middle of a quadrille is not the best place for private conversation, so he was obliged to talk the conventional twaddle of "society on tip-toe," which was probably a relief to his partner.

Mabel was much interested in a lady who wore some curious Indian-looking ornaments on her dress and in her hair, and begged her husband to find out her name and all about her.

Cyril always attended to the slightest wish expressed by his wife; so, after depositing her in a comfortable seat, he went off to find Lady Stapleton.

Meanwhile, most of the couples who had joined in the quadrille were crowding out of the room in quest of champagne or claret-cup to refresh their thirsty throats.

As the staircase was completely blocked, Violet consented to be led into the conservatory, feeling sure that her trusty allies would not forget her. Ralph Armitage sat by her side on a low sofa, placed against a background of glowing azaleas, every vein in his body throbbing with intense emotion.

How lovely she looked, her white dress scarcely whiter than her neck, her eyes as deep and true a violet as the darkest of the panes on her skirt!

"You should not wear those!" he said, in a low but hurried tone, touching one of the heartseases with the tip of his finger. "You are the last woman to cry out *outre* à moi (think of me). Don't we think of you enough already? Don't you drive us mad fast enough with—with your beauty!"

"No," with a nervous laugh, and a quick glance towards the door, which was draped with the trailing branches of a new Mexican creeper, through which glimpses of the now half empty ball-room were to be seen. "Not half fast enough. I'm an old married woman, and all my powers of fascination are going from me."

"I wish to Heaven they were, Violet!"

"Not that name, please," drawing up her neck, whilst the diamonds gleamed on the whiteness of her skin. "You always seem to forget that I am Mrs. Sartoris."

A shiver ran through him from head to foot, and his cheeks grew lividly pale. He tried to speak, but only muttered something quite incoherent.

"You are ill, you feel faint; I will get someone to fetch you a glass of water!" she exclaimed anxiously.

He laid his hand on her dress to prevent her from rising.

"No, I'm all right. It is the uncertainty—the suspense—which is killing me."

"What suspense!" she asked, in wonder, fixing her eyes on his agitated face.

"Suspense! I said nothing about suspense. You treat me like a dog; but that will be put a stop to some day."

"You've nothing to complain of."

"Haven't I though!" in a harsh voice. "Do you ever look me in the face, and give me a smile such as you give to Landon or Belfether?"

"They amuse me and you don't."

"No, I'm not fond of playing the part of clown or pantaloon; but you might have a spark of interest in me. One day you shall—I swear you shall!" striking his own breast with his

clenched fist, whilst his eyes shone like livid coals.

There was something in his gaze that kept her spell-bound, although she longed to run away.

"I want to go back," she said, gently. "I am afraid my aunt may be wanting me. Will you take me, please?"

"There is no hurry. Can't you stay with me for a minute?" reproachfully.

"I have—I have! Oh, Lord Belfether!" with a gasp of relief, as his fair head parted the branches of the creeper, "take me to my aunt!"

"With pleasure," stepping forward quickly, and offering his arm, darning at the same time a suspicious glance towards Armitage.

Ralph drew his hand across his burning forehead, and pulled himself together with an effort.

"I will go and tell Lady Stapleton that you want her," summoning a smile to his feverish lips, and with a bow he took himself off.

Lord Belfether seemed in no hurry to lose his chance of a *tête-à-tête*. He stood quite still, till Violet looked up into his face with an amused smile, and asked him if he had taken root.

"No; I behaved like a brute just now," he broke out passionately. "What right had I to be jealous of Landon or anyone else? And on my last night, too, to make you remember me always as an impudent fool! Will you ever forgive me?"

"I forgive you now," softly.

To tell the truth she had been very much annoyed with him; but his evident penitence disarmed her at once.

"Thanks—you are too good! May I say goodbye to you here? I shan't get such a chance again. I shall think of you wherever I go—I needn't tell you that," looking down into her face with the sadness of parting clouding the brightness of his own.

She stooped, and breaking off one of the coveted heartseases, put it into his hand.

"There! That is to remind you to write to me if you have any news. I shall always be thirsting for it."

"I will keep you posted up in everything," taking out his pocket-book to find a safe receptacle for his treasured flower.

Then he held out both his hands, and she put hers into them, feeling as if she could scarcely restrain herself from throwing her arms round his neck, for wasn't he going to bring Jack back to her—if he could!

The fair head bent very low, the fair moustaches rested softly, first on one small hand, and then the other.

There was nothing on earth he would not have done at the moment—aye, and willingly too—for the wife that was no wife—the wife whom that other man had cast off.

"Heaven bless you!" she said, with a catch in her breath, whilst tears of hope and gratitude gathered in her eyes, and her lips trembled.

Without a word he drew her hand once more through his arm, and brushing aside the creeper, his face unusually set and grave, he led her back into the drawing room.

They were met by Cyril Landon, who said hurriedly,—

"Lady Stapleton says, will you send in the rest of the guests, and take the top of the table!"

"But aunts ought to sit there! What is she thinking of?" said Violet, in surprise.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT WAS THE MYSTERY?

Mrs. Sartoris did the honours with such grace that few people asked where Lady Stapleton was. Champagne corks popped, plates clattered, tongues wagged merrily. Every jest was greeted with merry laughter, and bright eyes flashed brighter than ever when the right man slipped into the empty chair, and two heads drew closer together. Violet's eyes roamed from Mabel, quietly discussing some aspic jelly, to Cyril, waiting politely, though with a graver face than usual, on the Duchess of Kensington.

If there were any mystery Mabel evidently

knew nothing about, but Cyril might; for he was not amusing the Duchess, as he generally did. For a long while she had to attend to the people about her, answering their jokes with a smile, or with some sparkling repartee; but her mind was uneasy all the time.

"What is the matter?" said Lord Belfether, in a low tone, after watching her face with keen interest.

"I wonder so what has become of my aunt?"

"Didn't Lady Stapleton go down with the first set?"

"But the Duchess was with the first, and she is here still."

"Yes; and probably will be here with the third—if there is a third—for my mother's appetite is as large as her heart," and her son cast a laughing glance in the Duchess's direction, which made her shake her head at him.

The supper went on cheerfully enough. There was a display of magnificent plate, belonging to the deceased peer, and exquisite glass from the choicest manufactories, and the *loveliest* of flowers from countless hothouses; whilst the viands were of the daintiest that Gunter could supply. The wines were far above the average of what is generally met with at balls, so the men were content, for good wine is the special hobby of the male sex; and the women were satisfied with everything, perhaps because they had everything to satisfy them.

"Mrs. Sartoris, you are eating absolutely nothing!"

"Indeed I am. It is so foolish of me, but I feel as if something were happening. Did you see Mr. Landon hurry out of the room?"

"No; but perhaps it was to order some more champagne."

"No, Winter would see to that."

"Then to see that the musicians feed. He has got such a charitable heart, and people so often forget them!"

"Ah! It might be that. Cyril never forgets anybody but himself!"

"That is why you are always remembering him," with a grimace.

Violet smiled, then beckoned the butler to her with her fan.

"There's nothing the matter, is there?" she asked in a low voice.

Winter's mouth shut up tight, then opened, as if he were afraid that some remark would escape him against his will.

"My lady is engaged, ma'am."

"Engaged! At this time of night?" her colour coming and going. "Is anyone with her?"

"Yes, ma'am—a Frenchman!"

"A Frenchman! Oh! then it's news from abroad," and she rose hurriedly.

"Sit down," said Ralph Armitage, harshly. She did not know that he was near, and started convulsively at the sound of his voice. "Lady Stapleton does not want you. Don't you see that you are already making an uncomfortable impression on all these people?"

"Will you go and ask Mr. Landon to speak to me?"

"Yes, if you promise to go back into the drawing-room, and not excite yourself about nothing."

"I will do my best."

"Tell them to strike up at once. You must set them going, or everything will be at a standstill."

"I hope that fellow orders you about enough!" said Lord Belfether, angrily, when they were standing at the top of the ball-room.

"Something has come over him to-night. Look at him dancing with Mabel Landon! I am sure he is terrifying her."

"I believe the man's drunk!"

"No, no, not that; mad, perhaps. How radiant Lady Jane looks!"

"Yes, somebody must have left her a legacy. Evidently Armitage has been too much for Mrs. Landon, for she is deposited on a sofa panting."

"Yes, and now he is worrying his sister."

"Let us go and see what it is about," she added, presently, "and then I can scold him for not doing as I told him."

They crossed the room with difficulty, and

when they reached the spot where Lady Jane had been standing, found that she and her brother were slowly making their way towards the door, talking very earnestly.

Ralph had astonished his sister by begging her to come away. She objected strongly, urging that it was still early, and that some of her best dances were yet to come off.

"Why should we go!"

"You will be sorry for it if you don't. You are not such a baby as to care about staying for that last!" contemptuously.

She looked up into his face, and her heart almost stopped beating.

"What is it? You are keeping something back!"

"I know nothing—I swear I don't."

"So shocking! Such a dreadful blow!" said a voice behind her.

She turned eagerly, but her brother laid his hand upon her wrist, and absolutely dragged her away. And she was obliged to offer no resistance for fear of making a scene.

The band was playing vigorously, but the strains of the *Myosotis* floated idly through the emptying room; for with one consent the crowds were hurrying away. A whisper had passed from Lip to Lip, and there was a general movement towards Violet, who was completely hemmed in by the departing guests.

Why were they going? Why did they all give her a pitying glance—yet say nothing beyond an ordinary phrase of conventional politeness?

She had to keep up a smile, whilst her heart was throbbing with wild anxiety, and the melody of the waltz seemed to be echoing through her brain like music in a nightmare.

Lord Belfether had gone before the general rush, having several things to see to before his early start on the morrow. Cyril was nowhere to be seen, and even Ralph Armitage had disappeared without waiting to say good-bye.

She tried to comfort herself with the thought that if the bad news had concerned her she would have been the first object of interest, and her friends would certainly not have chosen that particular moment for deserting her.

Mabel she spied fast asleep on a sofa, having sunk down quite exhausted after that furious gallop with Mr. Armitage. Her head was slightly bent forward, as if she were slumbering her bouquet, and she was evidently slumbering as peacefully as a child.

Violet, though she loved her friend tenderly, was fretted by the sight of that placid sleep, when she herself was disturbed by wild anxiety. Yet she felt she would not rouse her for the world.

The music ceased, the musicians looked round in surprise at the emptiness, and began to pack up their instruments with all haste, being anxious to secure as much of a night's rest as they could in the midst of their busy lives.

They trooped out of the room, carrying their shrouded instruments with them, looking, to Violet's excited fancy, like mutes at a funeral.

Then there was profound silence, the brilliant lights in the gilded sconces seeming to mock the emptiness. Violet stood like a statue under the Venetian chandelier waiting. Presently there was the sound of a footstep on the staircase, and Cyril Landon came into the room.

She did not move an inch, only kept her eyes fixed upon his face in breathless expectation.

"Let me take you downstairs," he said, but his voice sounded odd and strange. "Lady Stapleton wants to speak to you in the boudoir."

She took his arm without a word, for a deadly fear was upon her, and she did dare to ask a question. As they neared the door she felt as if she must find some excuse for delay, and turned her head towards the sofa where Mabel was sleeping in happy unconsciousness of all that was passing.

"Your wife," she said, and it seemed as if her voice had changed as much as Cyril's, for her throat felt dry as a chip. Cyril looked towards his young wife, and his face softened.

"I will come back," he said, and stepped out on the landing.

There was a knot of footmen standing in the

hall, but Winter made a sign to them, and they all withdrew to a distance whilst he opened the door of the boudoir in solemn silence. Violet turned her face to Cyril, and her lips parted, but no words came from them.

A kindly pressure of the small hand that rested on his arm was his only answer to the mute question.

One glance assured her there was no one in the room but Lady Stapleton. If a Frenchman had been there he had already departed.

There was a small tray on the table with a decanter and two wine-glasses, one of which had been used. The fire burnt low in the ornamental grate, as if no one had had time or thought to replenish it, and Lady Stapleton shivered as she rose slowly from the velvet-covered sofa, and, holding out her arms, drew Violet close to her motherly breast, saying pitifully,

"Oh, my poor child!"

Violet would not let her head be drawn down, but putting her hand under her aunt's chin, compelled her to turn her face towards hers.

"Tell me the worst, I can bear it," she said, in a hard, cold voice utterly unlike her own.

"You have not seen your husband for a long while," said Lady Stapleton, pulling her down beside her on the sofa, and stroking her soft brown hair as if she were a child, whilst her own lips trembled, and tears rained from her eyes; "and you've grown quite accustomed to being without him!"

No answer, but the stony gaze of a pair of eyes which seemed wondrous large.

Poor Lady Stapleton! It was a hard task, and she did not know how to get through it. Cyril made her a sign to be quick, for he saw that Violet's apparent calm was not true composure but the result of nerves strung to the highest pitch, and the longer she was kept in a state of dread expectation the less her strength would be able to bear the final blow.

"If he never came back again," began Lady Stapleton, but Violet stopped her, pressing both her hands in a clasp of iron,—

"Don't beat about the bush," she said, hoarsely. "Is Jack dead?"

Then Cyril took up a travelling-cap which was lying on the sofa, and held it out to her.

"This was found on the shore of a French lake!"

"He drowned himself!" with a gasp, and a choking spasm in the throat. "Oh, Heaven! I did he hate me as much as that?" and with a shudder passing from head to foot she hid her face on her aunt's shoulder, and there was an awful silence broken only by a woman's sobs.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADY JANE'S DESPAIR.

JACK SARTORIS has drowned himself!

The news spread fast as a plague. It was the universal topic in the clubs. Nobody had seen much of him lately, but it was astonishing to find how many intimate friends had to mourn his loss.

"Never did a mean thing in his life," said one.

"Never refused to help a fellow out of a hole," sighed another.

"A thorough good fellow down to the ground," maintained a third.

"It was that giddy young wife of his who broke his heart," growled a sour old bachelor, who had once been snubbed by Violet because his attentions had become too marked.

It seemed so weirdly grotesque to unite the dismal idea of suicide with the bodily form of cheery Jack Sartoris.

"I always said he would shoot himself by accident," said Ned Clinton, staring out of one of the large windows in the Caritor, with his hand in his pockets, "or tumble down a precipice, or be stabbed in the back by a rascally guide for the sake of his 'express' and his watch-chain, but this quite bowls me over. I'd have betted any amount against it. I'd have staked my head with confidence."

"Yes, because no one would have bothered

you to pay up," remarked a friend, with a dry smile.

"Don't chaff—I'm upset. We spent such a famous time together in the Andes! He was the pleasantest companion possible. Jove! there goes Armitage with a pile of luggage. I wonder what mischief he is up to! There's something wrong."

"Wrong!" exclaimed his friend, with a chuckle. "I don't think he will be wrong after this. Why he's dead on Sartoris's wife, and now that she's free, he may chance to get her."

"Not he! When a woman marries she wants something more cheerful than a death's head opposite to her at table; and Armitage looks always as down in the mouth as if he was sitting at a funeral feast, and had been cheated out of his legacy. I'm off to leave a card in Brock-street."

With a nod to his friend he sauntered off, whilst the former looked round at another ally, and said, in a low voice,—

"Shouldn't wonder if this news landed a certain cousin of his in a lunatic asylum."

"What, Lady Jane?"

"Hush! someone will hear you. Armitage had better have taken her away somewhere, for she's sure to make a fool of herself—swathe herself in crepe from head to foot, and sob through every sermon."

"Was it a case?"

"Of spoons on her side—the woman always goes too far in these platonic friendships. Hope we shan't hear of something too dramatic in Eton-square. I shall send my sister to call there this afternoon."

"Let me know if anything's up," said the other eagerly, for men are just as inquisitive about their neighbours' feelings as women, although they would deny it indignantly.

Poor Lady Jane! The horror of desolation had fallen upon her—just when her hopes had been raised by a message from a friend in Austria. Lottie Verner had declared that she had seen Mr. Sartoris at the Imperial Theatre in Vienna, and sent her brother to call at his hotel the week after, when he was told that the English minor, whose name they changed into something quite different, had already started for England.

Lottie was famed for the mistakes she made, but Lady Jane had buoyed herself up with the hope that in this one instance her erratic eyes had really seen the man she thought they saw.

Day after day she had expected him to walk in. As she sat in the Haymarket Theatre that night she half hoped to find a letter from him lying on the hall-table when she got home. She would not go out during the following day, for fear lest she should miss him.

And now she could go out or stay in—it would make no difference. Never again would she hear his well-known knock, or his firm light step on the stair! Jack Sartoris was dead, and with him had gone all the poetry of a perilous friendship.

He was gone, and all the fruit of her lies and treacheries, and evasions, had passed away as completely as the pretence paper-money which the Chinese burn for the benefit of their friends in the spirit world.

She sat hour after hour in the same position, with a book on her knees to deceive anyone who happened to come into the room, whilst her thoughts travelled dimly over the past years.

She knew that the love which had been so innocent in its birth-spring had grown into sin as soon as Jack Sartoris had become the husband of Violet Mayne; but, after all, he had been "so little married," as the French would say, that it had seemed to make but little difference, and the thought that she could be of some comfort to him still was dangerously sweet.

Was it years ago, or only a few months, that she stood in that room, and burnt a letter? It was but a little thing—a piece of paper crackling in the flames of a few matches—and yet it had separated husband and wife! It had turned her—Lady Jane Armitage—into a reckless, desperate woman.

It had seared her conscience, but brought no penitence in its wake. And a crime which is not repented of doubles and trebles its sin as the years go by.

There was a step outside, a hand laid on the

handle of the door ; and as the door opened she looked up with heavy abstracted gaze, and saw her brother.

" Ralph ! what is it ? " she exclaimed, involuntarily, directly she caught sight of his ashen face. A terrible foreboding shot across her mind. There was something else—something perhaps more terrible than Jack's death.

" What do you mean ? " he said, suddenly. " I came to tell you I am off. I feel restless—I've stayed rusting here too long."

" Where are you going ? "

" To Paris first—perhaps to the Riviera. I don't want to be bothered with letters, so I shall leave no address."

" Then I'm not to write to you ? " scarcely knowing if she were glad or sorry.

" No, it won't be a great deprivation," with a slight sneer. He went up to the fireplace, arranged a coal more to his satisfaction with the toe of his boot, leant his arm against the mantelpiece, and looked down into the fire with sombre eyes.

His presence fidgeted Lady Jane. She wanted no sneering glances thrown at her in her sorrow; but as she looked at him she thought of Bertie Mayne, and the brotherhood of craft and sin in which he had linked those two together. Oh ! if he could see into the depths of their hearts would he be content now—now that the due reward had come to the one, but not to the other ! Ralph scarcely looked like a successful lover, though the woman he loved was free, and he might take his chance with the rest. His eyes were sunken, with dark circles round them, as of a man's who had watched the night through in wild unrest; his cheeks had fallen in, as if after a wasting illness, and all the youth and the hope and happiness of life in its prime had gone from his expression. Had a blight fallen on them both ?

She got up from her seat with a strange yearning in her empty heart, and laid her hand affectionately on his arm. Alas ! he shook it off as if it had been a reptile, and shrank from her look of sisterly love.

" Don't—don't, Jane," he said, in a voice of pain, and held up his hand as if to hide his face, " don't ask me to stay. I should go mad if I stayed here. Months and months must all go by before I speak, and waiting is a thing I could never stand. Let me go—don't say a word to stop me, or you will be sorry."

" Oh Ralph ! for Heaven's sake, if you have anything weighing on your mind, tell me ! " she cried, timidly, as she clung to his arm, completely carried away by the vague terror with which she was possessed.

" Don't be a fool ! " he said roughly. " Just because I'm out of sorts and going away for a change, you talk as if I were a convict escaping."

" Take me with you—I want a change. Oh ! so desperately—you can't tell ! I would give anything on earth to go," she cried, passionately.

" No—no, it would never do. My friends wouldn't be the sort for a woman ; you would make me abominable. Stay here, and set the right side of Violet and the old lady. Comfort the poor girl ! " he said, hoarsely, and turned his face away.

" You only care for her. I might die or go mad—it doesn't matter to you a bit," and down went Lady Jane's face on the edge of the mantelpiece, whilst her shoulders shook with convulsive sobs.

Ralph stared, for such an exhibition of feeling on the part of his sister he had never witnessed before. His heart was full of pity for her, and yet he dared not show it, knowing that she would shrink from him as from a leper and an outcast, if she once suspected his crime. He stood by her side, pulling his moustache, outwardly cold, unfeeling, and impulsive, inwardly conscience-stricken and stirred to the heart's depths.

" Don't cry, old girl ! " he said, not unkindly ; " nothing was ever made better by giving way. Marry your friend Cæcilia, and you will find there is much consolation in received bills, and plenty of funds to draw upon."

" As if I cared a straw for money," she cried, lifting her tear-stained face in a burst of indignation.

" Oh ! you don't—don't you ? You would be

sure to set up a howl if you hadn't got any. Well, good-bye ! " holding out his hand.

" Aren't you going to kiss me ? " in surprise.

His ashen cheek flushed as he stooped his head, and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

" Cheer up ! and give my love to mother."

" Won't you see her ? She's sure to be in."

" No ; I shall be too late. Lots of things to do," he said, hurriedly, and walked quickly across the room.

At the door he turned.

" Don't forget to go to Brook-street," he said, then gave a little nod, and closed the door behind him.

Lady Jane stood where he had left her, and with a slight moan hid her face in her hands. How she envied Violet her widow's weeds !

Mrs. Sartoris could put on yards of *étope* although she had not seen her husband for years, and shant herself up as much as she liked ; whilst if Lady Jane Armitage put on a black dress, and declined so much as one dinner-party, all the gossips in town would prick up their ears immediately. And yet she had been his chosen friend and confidant, and, as Bertie Mayne said, had seen him more often than his wife.

There was nobody on earth to pity her, and she felt as desolate as if she had been shipwrecked on a lonely island out of the track of passing ships on the broad breast of the Atlantic.

Her mother was too much engaged in social duties to find much time to spend with a daughter who objected to paying morning calls ; her father was thoroughly engrossed in politics ; and her brother, who was her only hope in her home-life, had just left her, curtly refusing to take her with him. Was life worth the trouble of living ?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CYRIL BRINGS BACK THE PORTMANTEAU.

It seemed as if the knocker at No. 10 Brook-street would soon come off its hinges, for it is no exaggeration to say that it was never at rest.

From the first thing in the morning till long after dusk there was a constant tap-tap-tap at the door, followed by a subdued murmur between Winter and somebody on the doorstep.

The old china bowl, which was the receptacle for cards, had to be emptied twice a day, and the butler had to leave all his other duties to the footman, as he chose to answer all inquiries in his own impressive way with the decorous amount of gravity that was suitable to the occasion.

It is better not to dwell on the pitiable state of the young wife when she found that her last chance of reconciliation was taken from her.

Day after day she had pictured the moment when he would come back to her, and she would go to him with a frank confession of the absurd pride which had kept her from explaining the real reason for the presence of Cyril's photograph, when half-a-dozen words would have averted the misery of years.

And then she fancied how he would accuse himself of cruel harshness, and take her to his arms, never—oh ! never to be parted again, and all her future life would be one dream of happiness !

Now the light and the joy were on one side of a back door, and she on the other, in the cold grey twilight of disappointment.

" Oh ! if I had but seen him once ! " she cried again and again, till Lady Stapleton wondered if it would be better to tell her that she had seen him, and spoken to him, and even loved him, under the name of St. John.

But who could tell what the effect would be ! It would be maddening to her to think he had been with her, ready to forgive and forget, and that she had sent him away in a storm of passion.

She would feel so certain that all would have gone right if she had only known that he was Jack, and his jealousy of Cyril Landen would have been laughed to scorn.

Lady Stapleton came to the conclusion that as she had not spoken before it was better to hold her tongue ; but she was sorely tempted to break her resolution about twenty times a day.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

EPPS'S GRATEFUL—COMFORTING, COCOA BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

TOWLE'S PENNYROYAL & STEEL PILLS FOR FEMALES.

QUICKLY CORRECT ALL IRRIGUALTITIES, REMOVE ALL OBSTRUCTIONS, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex. Boxes 1/12 & 2/9 (contains three times the quantity), of all Chemists. Sent anywhere on receipt of 15 or 24 stamps, by E. T. TOWLE & CO., Manufacturers, Dryden St., Nottingham.

Decays of Irritations, Injuries and Worthless.

FACETIE.

TELLIT: "To be successful in business a man must confine himself to one line." Akit: "What if he is a palmist?"

STOUT LADY: "Does a bicycle reduce the flesh?" Mr. Simpkins (wearily): "If you buy it on the instalment plan it does."

HE: "I thought you knew the Browns. Don't you live in the same square?" She: "Yes, but you see we don't move in the same circle."

NEPHEW: "Oh, the gout is nothing, uncle. I shouldn't mind if I had it." Uncle: "I shouldn't mind, either, if you had it."

JUSTICES of the Peace in England are nominated by the Lord Lieutenant of their county, and appointed by the Lord Chancellor.

CASHIER: "Madam, you will have to get some person to introduce you before I can cash that cheque." Lady (haughtily): "But I don't want to get acquainted with you."

"No young man," said the solemn and sorphomical person, "can succeed by keeping his eye on the clock." "How about the watchmaker?" asked the impudent person.

CLERK: "Perhaps you'd like to look at some goods a little more expensive than these." Shopper: "Not necessarily, but I would like to look at some of better quality."

"WELL, Daisey, shall we pay the house rent or give a dinner?" "Why, give the dinner of course! What good will paid-up house rent do us if we lose our social position?"

"As I came by the kitchen window, Jane, I thought I saw you on a young man's knee!" "Well, ma'am, it is an artist friend of mine, and I have been giving him a few sittings."

WHEN a young bride was asked how her husband turned out, she replied that "he turned out very late in the morning and turned in very late at night."

CHOLLY: "Yaa, indeed. If any girl should wed me it would break me all up." Miss Peppery: "Ah! but then you're so simple it would be easy to put you together again."

TESS: "She's doing very well on the stage, I hear." Jess: "Yes, she says she is making rapid strides in her profession." Tess: "R'old strides! She means high kicks."

KENDRICK: "Young Browne added a to his name after he inherited his uncle's big fortune." Fosdick: "That's quite right. Rich people are entitled to more ease than poor people."

"I SUPPOSE," said Miss Snapp's fiancé, "you'll be sorry when I marry your sister and take her away to live with me!" "No," replied her little brother, "I never did like you much."

CALLER: "I hear that your husband was caught by the explosion. Was he hurt?" Mrs. McGagan: "He war. They tell me that war av his wounds is fatal, but th' other two ain't dangerous an' well heal up quick."

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is the celebrated trick donkey, Dot," said the clown, as the beast was being led into the ring. "After many years of effort, I am able to say I can make him do anything he wants to."

TOMMY (congratulating his grandfather on his birthday): "Dear grandfather, we wish you a very happy birthday, and mamma said if you gave Mary and me a shilling, we mustn't lose it!"

A BIG bulking fellow was brought up before an Exeter magistrate. "Your business?" demanded the magistrate. "My business?" Then, after consideration, "My wife is a washerwoman!"

WIFE (in railway train): "It's mortifying to have you act so. Why don't you get up and help that young lady raise that window?" Beautiful Husband: "She's so pretty I was afraid you'd be mad."

LITTLE CHARLIE (at supper): "Grandma, do your glasses make things look bigger?" Grandma: "Yes, dearie. Why?" Charlie: "Oh, I only thought if they did, I'd like you to take 'em off while you're cuttin' the cake!"

MRS. UPTON: "Who are those men staggering along?" Mr. Upton: "Mr. Richmann and his coachman, Mike." "What is the matter with them?" "Mr. Richmann has evidently been dining and Mike has been drinking."

A CLERK in a City house asked for a half-day's absence because he wanted to attend a funeral in the country. When he returned, the next morning, with red hands and freckled face, his employer asked, quietly: "Where are the fish?"

MISTRESS: "This water has a queer taste." Careful Servant (who has heard much scientific conversation): "It's all right, mum. There ain't a live germ in it, mum. I run it through the sausage-cutter."

PROFESSOR (so student of surgery): "Please inform the class the names of bones forming the skull." Student: "Ah—er—I do not at the present time remember, but I know that I have them all in my head." (Upcast in class.)

ARDENT SUITOR: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I didn't know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much, but it takes very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

"I HOPE things are more peaceful in the choir than formerly," said the pastor. "Yes, sir," replied the organist; "It's perfectly calm now." "I'm glad to hear it. How was peace restored?" "Everybody excepting myself resigned."

"Si," yelled the neighbour from the road, "your wife has just run off with Bill Johnson." "She has, she has!" answered the farmer in the field; "well, Bill always was a borrein' trouble. Git up there!"

WASHERWOMAN: "Please, sir, I've brought your things from the wash." Mr. Smithsey: "Well, take them to someone else, and leave me someone else's washing. In that way I think I shall get more of my own things."

LADY (to new servant): "You should take a lesson from the cook. You are always untidy, whereas she washes her face three or four times a day." Servant: "No wonder, mum. Her young man is a chimney-sweep!"

HE: "Then you regret being an old maid?" She: "Yes, I do. I might as well have been downtrodden by a husband and six children of my own, as be at the beck and call of the husbands and children of all my sisters and intimate friends."

"I AM not at all certain," said the father, "that my daughter loves you sufficiently to warrant me in entrusting her to your keeping for life." "Well," replied the young man, "perhaps you haven't had the same advantages for observing things that I have."

WIFE: "My dear, you haven't a cold, have you?" Husband: "No." "Any headache?" "None at all." "Rheumatism?" "Not a particle." "You don't think it will rain, do you?" "No danger. Why?" "This is Sunday, and it's most church time."

"But if you could sell these suits for £2 last month, how does it happen you want so much more for them now?" "That's the trouble, my friend. We couldn't sell those suits for £2. Nobody wanted them at that price. At £2 7s. 6d. they are going off like hot cakes."

"MRS. MCINTY: "An' what did th' doctor say wos th' matter wid y're eye, Patsy?" Small Son: "He say-ed thar was some foreign substance in it." Mrs. McInty: (with an "I told you so" air) "Now, maybe ye'll kape away from thim Eyballans."

A NAVAL OFFICER, who wished to bathe in a Ceylon river, asked the native to show him a place where there were no crocodiles. After having enjoyed his dip, he asked his guide why there were never any crocodiles in that pool. "Because, sah," the Cingalese replied, "they plenty 'fraid of shark."

SUCCESSFUL FARMER (whose son has been to college): "What was all that howlin' you was doin' out in th' grove?" Cultured Son: "I was merely showing Miss Brighteyes what a college yell is like." Farmer: "Well, I swan! Colleges is some good after all. I'm goin' into town to sell some truck to-morrow. You kin go along an' do th' callin'."

"SHE is a girl of very little feeling, I think. I notice that she never cries even at the most pathetic plays." "No; her complexion won't permit."

ART DEALER: "Here's something fine. It's 'The Battle of Waterloo' by Vandyck." Markley: "Is it, really? I thought Vandyck died before the battle occurred." Art Dealer: "Er—so he did. But—er—you see, this is one of his posthumous paintings."

"NELLIE dear," said the indulgent father to his four-year-old daughter, "if you like your new dolly, you ought to come and put your arms round my neck and give me a kiss." Nellie complied, but as she did so she remarked: "Oh, papa, I does deah spoil you dreadful!"

"HENRIETTA," said Mr. Meekton, "there is one request that I should like to make of you." "What is it?" "If I get to acting a little bit overbearing don't notice it. At any rate, don't hold it up against me. You see, every once in a while I get to thinking of the fact that I am Henrietta Meekton's husband, and I can't help feeling just a mite haughty."

"You told me this well was eighty feet deep," said the man who had bought the farm. "I measured it this morning, and found it to be only thirty-seven. I have always been told that truth lies at the bottom of a well, but that doesn't seem to be the case with this one." "I don't know," observed the man who had sold the farm. "It does seem to have lied a little about the bottom of this well."

"I AM Sherlock Holmes," said the great detective. "I think I can inform—" "Yes, sir," the man interrupted his caller. "If you'll wait until I've put the baby to sleep I'll come down and talk to you." "Ah! Your second," said Holmes, smiling. "Heaven's! how did you guess it?" "Very simple. If it were your first you'd wake it up to show it to me. If you had more than two you'd be at your club about this time."

EDITH: "There is one thing in particular that I like Mr. Tactin for. He is so frank, you know. He always tells me of my faults without the least hesitation. That was the agreement I caused him to make. Bertha: "Do you mean to say that you do not get angry with him?" Edith: "Never." Bertha: "Tell me some of the faults he has found in you." Edith: "Oh, he hasn't found any yet. When I ask him to name them he always says that I am faultless."

STAR: "This is a very good play, but it will have to be revised considerably." Dramatist: "Impossible, sir." Star: "Oh, it must be. You make the hero appear in every act. That won't do. The hero must be taken out of the first act, and also out of the last." Dramatist: "What! Open and close the play without the hero?" Star: "Certainly. You see I am my own manager, and I shall be busy in the box-office during the first act and very often busy with the sheriff during the last act."

AN old Ulster woman who had made money by selling whisky in a village on fair and market days was visited when she layed dying by a minister, to whom she spoke about her temporal as well as her spiritual affairs. "And so, Molly," said the minister, "you tell me you are worth all that money!" "Indeed, minister, I am," replied Molly. "And you tell me," continued the minister seriously, "that you made it by filling the noggins!" "Ns, ns, minister," exclaimed the dying woman; "I made maist of it by not fillin' the noggins."

"LOOK here, sir," growled the smart customer to the proprietor of the restaurant: "I don't often complain about my food, but that pepper of yours is half pean." Proprietor: "You must be mistaken; I buy the pepper whole, and grind it myself." "I don't care; I tell you it is half pean." "Oh, very well if you will say so. Still, I'd like to see you prove it." "Well, sir, I prove it in this way: Pepper—p-e-p-p-e-r. Half p's. Do you see?" Here he laid down a five-shilling piece. "It's a joke. Ha! ha!" Your change, sir. That's good. Ha! ha!" "It's not so bad—but you have given me sixpence short." "I think not. We charge sixpence extra for pean."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen greatly loves Osborne, which was made into the fine place it is by the Prince Consort. The house and grounds are full of associations with him, and with very happy days for Her Majesty. A lift was some time ago constructed for the Queen's wheeled chair, by means of which Her Majesty ascends to her private apartments. There are many very fine paintings in the house and some good sculpture. In the corridor leading to the Indian Durbar room are clever drawings of types of the Queen's Indian soldiers. Many of the Diamond Jubilee presents to the Queen are at Osborne, which is a very charming marine residence.

AS it is now unlikely that the Queen will be able to visit Ireland, it is more than probable that the Prince and Princess of Wales will pay a visit to the Emerald Isle in the spring. If this plan is carried out they will be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and will, like the Queen, make a series of visits to special places of interest during their stay. They will be accompanied by Princess Victoria of Wales, who derived so much benefit from her visit to Ireland last spring. Should all these arrangements be carried out, the Queen, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the Duke and Duchess of York will all be absent from England at the same time.

ALTHOUGH the new Duke of Saxe-Coburg (the young Prince of Albany) is only sixteen, he will, according to German law, attain his majority in two years' time, and then the question of his marriage will come to the fore. Already there are rumours of an alliance between Duke Charles Edward and his cousin, Princess Beatrice, youngest daughter of the late Duke Alfred of Saxe-Coburg, a union which would give great satisfaction to the Queen. Princess Beatrice, who was greatly admired at the Queen's garden party in the summer, is a very attractive girl, and in Germany it has been hinted for some time that her mother would very gladly have the German Crown Prince for a son-in-law. Be that as it may, no one who knows the widowed Duchess can doubt for a moment that her daughter will be allowed to dispose of her hand according to the dictates of her own heart.

THE Princess of Monaco is the only Jewish consort of a reigning Sovereign. Princess Alice, as she is always called, was the daughter of the great Paris banker Heine, and at the time of her first marriage to the Duc de Richelieu was one of the wealthiest heiresses in her father's adopted country. Since her marriage to the Prince of Monaco she spends most of her time in the beautiful little Principality, but still frequently pays flying visits to England, for she has many intimate friends in London, and as a girl she spent a large portion of each year at Holland House.

QUEEN MARGUERITE of Italy is one of the most gifted queens in Europe. She draws, paints, studies dead languages, reads, writes, translates living languages, keeps a voluminous diary, and tries hard at every new kind of work she hears of, and nearly always with success. Her judgment in matters of art never errs, and she is an accomplished connoisseur in music. Her Majesty possesses the finest head of hair of any queen living—finer than that of the unfortunate Empress of Austria.

NOBODY but a personage of Royal blood may have a menu when dining with the Queen, a custom which seems akin to the sumptuary laws, and the sitting above and below the salt according to rank. The menu used at the Queen's table is simply headed "Her Majesty's Dinner," with the date affixed.

THE Queen always has a Christmas entertainment and Christmas gifts for her servants at Balmoral, at Windsor, and at Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty's health is always enthusiastically drunk at the entertainments. The Queen is wonderfully thoughtful for all her people, and earns the devotion with which her servants regard her.

STATISTICS.

LONDON contains one-fourth of all English people who live in towns.

THERE are two hundred and fifty-six railway-stations within six miles of St. Paul's Cathedral, Paris has only eighty-seven.

THREE Hundred English fishermen are drowned every year—nearly nine in 1,000 of those engaged.

IN the last forty years European Governments have added to their debt an average of eighty-seven million a year.

THE rate of increase in the English population between 1881 and 1891 was only 11.7 per cent.—the lowest of the century.

GEMS.

JEALOUSY is sustained as often by pride as by affection.

THE greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it.

WE are apt to measure ourselves by our aspiration instead of our performance. But in truth the conduct of our lives is the only proof of the sincerity of our hearts.

WHEN you make a mistake, do not look back at it for long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind, and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed; but the future is yet in your power.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TEA CAKE.—One pint of flour, into which put two teaspoonfuls of cream of tartar; one cup of sweet milk, into which put one teaspoonful of soda; two tablespoonfuls of butter, and one cup of sugar mixed well together; then break into it two eggs; add milk and flour; flavour with grated rind and juice of a lemon.

CURRY PUFFS.—Take the remains of a curry (mutton, chicken, or rabbit does equally well) and mince it very finely. Make some short pastry, cut in circles the size of a claret-glass. Place a little mince on each, moisten the edges, fold over, nick the edges with a fork, brush over with egg, and bake until the pastry is done. Serve either hot or cold. If cold, pack in a biscuit tin. To serve, arrange neatly on a dish-paper and garnish with parsley.

HOMBURG CREAMS are really delicious, and no more trouble than a custard. You will need five eggs, two lemons, and half a pound of castor sugar. Separate the yolks and whites of the eggs. Beat the yolks lightly. Mix with them the sugar, grated lemon-rind, and the strained lemon-juice. Beat the whites very stiffly. Put the yolks, &c., into a milk-boiler, or else a jug standing in a saucepan of boiling water, and stir over the fire till quite hot—not boiling. Stir in the whipped whites as lightly as possible. Take off the fire. Pour into custard-glasses and serve cold. This would fill about a dozen glasses.

DRESDEN CREAMS.—For these, whip a pint of good cream carefully till it just hangs on the whisk; divide it into three portions. To one third add enough strawberry-jam, which has been rubbed through a hair sieve, to flavour it. Make it a pretty pink with a few drops of cochineal; add to it one ounce of castor sugar and the juice of half a lemon. To another third add enough coffee-essence to well flavour and colour it; sweeten with castor sugar. To the last portion merely add enough vanilla and castor sugar to nicely flavour it. Take some macaroons, and on each arrange neatly with a forcing or teaspoon a heap of each kind of cream, and on the heap of vanilla cream sprinkle chopped pistachio nuts.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TWO new comets were discovered last year.

THE apartments of deceased kings of Italy are left absolutely untouched for two generations.

A MODEL of the human heart, working as in life and pumping blood through artificial arteries, is the work of a Continental physician.

THE British Army has had sixteen Commanders-in-Chief in the last two centuries. Five of them have been field-marshals.

JAPANESE workmen bathe the whole body once a day and some of them twice. Public baths are provided in every street.

CHLOROFORM is not administered to the same subject twice within a week if it can possibly be avoided, because it has been shown that the elimination of the drug is not completely effected within a shorter period.

ONE of the sparse population of Juan Fernandez, Alexander Selkirk's Island, is a S. wede who leads a hermit's life. He hardly speaks to his neighbours, and he subsists on the product of a small garden and by fishing.

SCENT farms furnish a new occupation for women, and a profitable one. It has already attracted a number of women, and it will only be a short time before American women fond of outdoor life will turn to it as they have done to violet farming.

ELECTRICITY was used for mining very early in its development, and one of the first plants was set up at Santa Rosalia, near Chihuahua, Mexico. Electricity is used exclusively in the goldfields of South Africa and Australia and in the diamond-fields of Brazil.

AN ingenious German has devised a method of plucking fowls. The dead bird is placed in a receptacle and subjected to several severe cross-currents of air from electric fans turning at the rate of five thousand revolutions a minute. The bird has every feather and quill blown off in a short space of time.

THE has a shadow, but few ever see it, except in an eclipse of the moon. Nevertheless, many of us have noticed on fine, cloudless evenings in summer, shortly before sunset, a rosy or pink arc on the horizon opposite the sun, with a bluish-grey segment under it. As the sun sinks the arc rises until it attains the zenith, and even passes it. This is the shadow of the earth.

NAILS of hardened rubber, first made in Germany, are being introduced with marked success in this country. They can be driven in by a hammer and used just like metal nails, and they have the advantage of being non-conductors of electricity. They are therefore valuable in electrical engineering work, as well as in other trades. Staples and other holdfasts are also made of this material, which is exceedingly durable.

THE proper food for men who use their muscles is that which contains the greatest amount of nitrogen. Barley and cheese are especially good. Rare beef, mutton and unbolted bread are good articles of diet for this class. Men who train prize-fighters understand that how much a man can do depends upon what he eats. The decline of prize-fighters furnishes additional proof along this line. When they lay aside their unbolted bread and fruit, their lean beef and mutton, and begin to eat, drink, and be merry, going back to rich foods, puddings, wines and liquors, the strength for which they were famed dwindles fast away. Men living in Arctic regions can drink fish oil by the quart and eat tallow by the pound, and the cold climate will burn it out, but dwellers in warm and temperate regions must eat what will furnish nourishment for muscle, bone, and brain in proper proportions. If a man wants to stand the cold he may eat buckwheat cakes, with plenty of butter and syrup, and fat pork and white beans, but when warm weather comes this diet will produce listlessness. For summer fruits and vegetables and but little meat is the proper regimen. Persons who expect to think should beware of things which simply produce fat.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ADMIRER.—De Wet is a native Boer.

LOUISA.—Louisa is German, the feminine of Louisa.

ESTHER.—Esther is a Hebrew word, meaning Secret.

L. B.—Apply to the Local Government Board, Whitehall.

J. M.—The census is usually taken in the month of April.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—You cannot insist upon any in a mutual separation.

DAVID.—It should be done in proper legal form; get a solicitor to do it.

FASHION.—The newest hats are quite flat, but they do not suit everyone.

IN DIFFICULTIES.—We cannot assume the responsibility of advising you.

TRoubLED.—If the piano is not paid for it can be taken away by the owner.

HAMMY.—It is often the truest politeness simply to do what you are requested to do.

STAN.—Watt was born at Greenock, on January 19th, 1753. He died on August 25th, 1819.

BOTHWELL.—The subsequent marriage nullifies the will, and another will must be made.

SCOT.—Guy's Hospital, with 620 beds, is the biggest in England. Glasgow Hospital has 630 beds.

APPRENTICE.—It depends upon what is in your articles of apprenticeship, and why he did it.

F. C.—Perhaps you may arrive at the knowledge you seek through the medium of a mutual friend.

FROM FOM.—The corps is being raised in South Africa by the Baden-Powell Police Committee.

FIRST COUSIN.—Any degree of cousin may lawfully marry, and their children would be legitimate.

IGNORAMUS.—You can dispose of your property as you wish. Make a will and have it properly attested.

MIKE'S DARLING.—Michael is from the Hebrew, the one like unto God. It was the name of one of the archangels.

ENTERPRISE.—It is all a delusion; there is no institution where a child is admitted upon such terms as those you mention.

DONA.—Candidates must be between the ages of 22 and 24. For further information apply to Civil Service Commissioners, Westminster.

AMBITION.—You would not better your condition by going to the United States of America; if wages are higher, the cost of living is high also.

RED HAND.—Lemon-juice is excellent for whitening the skin, but should never be used alone. Mix it with an equal quantity of elderflower-water.

LAL.—Stir one egg into half a pound of ground coffee, and put away for use as required. No further substance for settling will be needed, and the egg tends to preserve the aroma.

W. M.—Dissolve in about a pint of water as much common washing soda as the water will take up; wash the warts with this for a minute or two, and let them dry without wiping.

GIFTED ONE.—It requires as much study to succeed in the actor's profession as in any other, besides demanding many gifts of nature which other professions can dispense with.

A. B. C.—No, but if you marry again your second marriage is null and void, and your children illegitimate. On the other hand you will not be prosecuted for bigamy if you really believe she is dead.

PRIMERO.—The longest period any man has been Prime Minister of England during this century was one hundred and seventy-eight months, between 1812-1827. Lord Liverpool was Premier.

B. C.—The ribs are scraped with a bill of gudgeon, cut circularly, in order to render them pliant; and then, by drawing the edge of a blunt knife over the filaments, they assume the curly form so much admired.

CONSTANT READER.—Soap is not at all a desirable medium for cleaning the teeth, as, though it may whiten for the time, the alkaline process destroys the enamel. A very good tooth-powder is camphorated chalk.

IGNORANT ONE.—In English law, the testator must be over twenty-one years of age, and neither a lunatic nor an idiot; nor deaf nor dumb, nor drunk at the time of signing; nor an outlaw, nor an unpardoned felon.

LAUNDRY MAID.—The best plan is to well blue a quart or two of water, and from that pour into the bluing tub until you have the required tint. Do not overdo it. A deep blue always suggests the idea that it is a device to cover up dirt.

DRAUGHTS.—Take rose-leaves—the more the better—and put them into a little water, then boil; after this, strain it into a bottle, and cork it tight. You will find this liquid very beneficial in removing redness and weakness from the eyes.

MADGE.—Froth perspiration arises from various causes. When it is not due to physical exertion it comes from disease. You should consult a competent physician, who, after a personal examination, will soon be able to give you relief.

DORIS.—One quart of warm milk, a piece of butter about the size of an egg, four eggs, a tablespoonful of salt, one cup of yeast, flour enough to make a stiff batter; beat it up with a large spoon; put it in to rise six hours, fill the rings half-full; bake them about twenty minutes.

DOESRY.—With so little to go upon, it is quite impossible to recommend a suitable present. Much depends, in the first place, upon your finances; then there are the tastes of the gentleman to be consulted, and then the relations between you must affect your gift to a certain extent.

CURIOS.—This privilege is reserved to ladies, in order to protect them from annoyance; as in company many casual introductions are made to persons with whom it may not be desirable to keep up an acquaintance. If the lady desires to have no further acquaintance with persons so introduced, she will, of course, make no recognition upon next meeting.

TYPEWRITER.—The Yost, the Barick, and other rival machines are well spoken of, but the Remington has the longest record of what may be called the perfect machine, and our experience favours it. You should, however, look round and examine the leading ones for yourself; there may be as good or better than the Remington.

O. D. T.—Take one ounce of oil of almonds, a quarter of an ounce of spongacite, and a quarter of a drachm of prepared resin, with any simple vegetable colouring to fancy; simmer these until thoroughly mingled. As soon as taken from the fire, stir into the mixture three or four drops of tincture of camphor; when nearly cold, add five or six drops of oil of rhodium.

AN UNBELIEVER.

They say the world is growing worse,
I don't believe it though;

They say men worship but the purse,
I don't believe it, though;

They say that greatness is no more,
That all the wise have gone before—

And only trouble is in store—

I don't believe it, though.

They say there are no saints to-day,
I don't believe it, though;

They say we tread a downward way,
I don't believe it, though;

They say there's only gloom ahead,
They say that all the knights are dead,

They say men's sweetest joys are fled—

I don't believe it, though.

They say the world grows fairer day by day,
And that's what I believe;

The good have not all passed away,

And that's what I believe;

Old Homer, of the sightless eyes,

And Caesar lie neath other skies,

But greater men than they will rise,

And that's what I believe.

The world grows fairer day by day,

And that's what I believe;

The good have not all passed away,

And that's what I believe;

Though many a one we loved is gone,

Fond hearts and true are beating on—

The happiest days are still to dawn,

And that's what I believe!

PUZZLED.—When trustees are appointed under a will it is for the purpose of exercising discretion in regard to the administration of the estate; if the testator had not thought there might be harm done by immediate settlement with the heirs—that is at six months after his death—he could have left all in hands of the executors; law insists upon the six months' delay.

GUM.—Write to the young woman suggesting that in the changed relationship she may think it right and becoming to banish from her sight all tokens of the old connection; in that case, you being in the same mind, will at once, or knowing it is her wish, send back all the presents she has given on condition of getting back all she received.

V. G.—In event of your getting married and having house put in husband's name, yet still being able to prove either by documentary evidence, such as an inventory taken previous to the marriage, or receipts in his name, the husband would not have power either to claim or dispose of the goods, but, of course, landlord could take them for rent of the house.

CONSTANT READER.—The best way to remove these is to make a paste of fuller's earth and water, to which ammonia has been added in the proportion of a tea-spoonful to half a pint. Spread this paste over the stains, rubbing it slightly in with your finger and leave till dry. Then brush off with a perfectly clean brush, and repeat the application if the stain has not disappeared.

MAT.—Pitman's is considered the best, because it is the outcome of over fifty years' experience with short-hand writing throughout the world; it has been perfected bit by bit, through adoption of suggestions made by writers everywhere, after the general body of those practising the art had tested and declared them to be improvements; in this way the system is now the built-up skill of a countless host of people, not the mere system of a single individual.

H. G. M.—Wash it clean and wipe quite dry, have boiling water in the fish kettle sufficient to completely cover the fish, add to the water two ounces of salt and a wine-glassful of vinegar. When you put in the fish the boiling of the water will be checked, but from the time it boils again allow from five to eight minutes quick boiling, according to size; five minutes is enough for a pound fish.

BASHFUL.—If the young lady is eager for your society, and strives to make herself agreeable to you, it is likely that she admires you. Whether her admiration is warm enough to be considered love, you yourself must decide by a resort to the tactical methods which all successful wooers practice. After having kept company with her for two years, you ought to know her real sentiments, or be shrewd enough to devise a method to make her declare them.

M. S.—Cleanses the marble thoroughly with washing soda and warm water to remove grease, or if it needs more drastic measures make a mixture with strongest soap-suds and quicklime to the consistency of milk, let it remain on for twenty-four hours, then wash off, and when dry rub steadily to repolish with oxide of tin (commonly called putty powder) and olive oil. Much, however, of the ornamental so-called "marble" is a made-up composition, and we cannot say how you can best treat that.

FARMER.—Practical farming cannot be learned from books; it may be possible to get a general idea of theory by reading, but it is impossible to reduce that to practice, except by engaging in the actual cultivation of land or management of stock; either take a year or two with a farmer or breeder in Scotland to gain an insight into methods, or attend the Agricultural College, Cirencester for a course. Natal offers no inducements to British farmers; New Zealand, your other choice, is good.

MARSH.—Take a radicin-sized rabbit, quarter of a pound of salt pork, a pound of flaky pastry, half a pint of stock or water, and two hard-boiled eggs. Cut the rabbit into shapely pieces, season them with pepper and salt, put them in the pie-dish alternately with the pork cut in pieces, and the eggs cut in quarters. Pour in the water, and cover the pie with the pastry. Brush over with beaten egg, and decorate with leaves cut in pastry; make a hole in the middle for the gases to escape. Bake for about an hour and a half.

SALLOW.—Sallowness of complexion is generally the result of a sluggish liver, which may be either constitutional or merely the result of hot weather or over-heated and badly-ventilated living and sleeping rooms. In these cases, diet and active exercise are the first requisites. Indeed, no good can be done by any external application until these two points have been attended to. Sallow complexions and complexion usually go together, so the great thing is to remove the former by relieving the latter. Avoid rich foods, and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.

CORNA.—Peel a gallon of fresh mushrooms, and after wiping them well, and discarding all that are not sound, cut them into small pieces and put them into a deep pan. Dry six ounces of sait in the oven, sift it and sprinkle it among the mushrooms. Cover the pan with a cloth and leave them four days, turning them over with a wooden spoon once every twenty-four hours. Then turn them into a preserving kettle, and let them simmer in their own liquor for fifteen minutes. Strain the liquor into a stew-pan and add to it three blades of mace, half an ounce whole black-pepper and a quarter ounce of allspice berries. Let it boil for twenty minutes. Pour into a jug, cover tightly and leave for twelve hours; then strain through a cloth and fill small bottles, pouring a little sald oil into each. Close with new corks and seal with wax.

O. S.—The celebrated Taj Mahal at Agra, India, known as Taj Mahal, was erected in the seventeenth century by the Emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to Mumtaz Mahal, his favourite queen, and it contains her remains. It is of white marble, one hundred feet in diameter and two hundred feet in height, built in the form of an irregular octagon and rising from a marble terrace, under which is a second terrace of red sandstone. At the corners of the marble terrace are lofty minarets, and in the centre of the main building rises a dome, flanked by cupolas of similar form. Every part, even the basement, the dome, and the upper galleries of the minarets, is inlaid with ornamental designs in marble of different colours, principally of pale brown and bluish violet. Here and there, also, the exterior and interior are decorated with mosaics of precious stones. The entire Koran is said to be written in mosaics of precious stones on the interior walls.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Bookseller.

NOTICE.—Part 497 is Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free Eightpence. Also Vol. LXV., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

... We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

ARE UNRIVALLED FOR THE COMPLEXION,
AND WILL BRING



The Blush of Health ::

:: to Pallid Cheeks.

Are **SPECIALLY SUITABLE** for the **DISEASES** and **AILMENTS**
common to **FEMALES** of all ages.

Sold everywhere, in Boxes, 1/1½ (56 pills) and 2/9 (168 pills).

6,000,000 BOXES SOLD ANNUALLY.

BEECHAM'S TOOTH PASTE

RECOMMENDS ITSELF.

It is Efficacious, Economical. Cleanses the Teeth, Perfumes the Breath,
and is a Reliable and Pleasant Dentifrice.

In Collapsible Tubes, One Shilling each.